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OR,

THE LEAGUE OF THREE.

A TALE OF COLONIAL TIMES.

BY JOS. E. BADGER, JR.,

AUTHOR OF THE FOLLOWING DIME NOVELS:

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RED DAN, THE RANGER.

CHAPTER I.

THE FOREST TREATY

"A MURRAIN take this cursed country! 'Tis only fit for those tawny-skinned niggers, the savage heathen. Devil grill me for stopper, Steed Bonnett, if you ever beguile me into leaving the Bonita again, to suffer torture in this outlandish wilderness!"

The voice—deep and sonorous, while yet peevish and grumbling—sounded strangely enough there in the vast forest. The two men paused for breath, as their route had led them through tangled undergrowth and over many a fallen tree.

"Ha! ha! my bully Dick is cowed—the game-cock droops tail because of a little rough walking. A rare tale to breathe in the ear of the beautiful Mistress ——," mockingly cried the other, as, removing the slouched hat, he wiped the beaded perspiration from his brow.

"Hold! Clap a stopper on thy jawing-tackle, Ranting Steed. You only remind me what a thrice-'curst fool I was to leave her, for the sake of a cruise through these woods—if they be woods. Devil roast thee for a lying dog! Plain sailing! Is that what you called it, Steed Bonnett?" was the testy rejoinder.

"I said so—and is it not plain sailing? Thy tongue is over long, Bully Dick," coolly added the other traveler.

"Gramercy! 'tis not so long as thy legs!" muttered Dick.

"How now, Master Worley?" suspiciously demanded the companion of the grumbler.

"I say 'tis fine jesting for *you*, who wear such long legs. Little matter were the bushes and briers as high as the main mast of my bonny Bonita, where *you* must tread. But I—

look here?" and Dick motioned with lugubrious indignation toward the rather stumpy pair of limbs that upheld his massive body.

The eye of Steed Bonnett followed this gesture, and a hearty laugh broke from his lips. Bully Dick's face wore an expression of injured dignity, mingled with ineffable disgust.

"You see—you laugh. Good! But I don't laugh. Look again—you see the reason? Bah! my hide is not that of an alligator, nor yet that of a shark. Bushes—briers—thorns! And my clothes—to say nothing of the tender hide beneath them—the gay ones that you bade me put on, to charm the fancy of the heathen beauties you said we would meet—you see them now? Devil comb my hair! but it is enough to make a saint swear!"

"That's what hurts ye then, Dandy Dick? Take comfort, lad. I will replace your soiled feathers, from my own kit. What they lack in breadth, will be made up in length. But come—sit down and nurse thy scratches while I take an observation."

The two persons thus introduced, seemed, truly, out of place in the spot where we meet them; a Carolina forest—almost swamp. That they were out of their element, the most casual observer could not fail to note.

The one addressed as Steed Bonnett scrambled up on a huge, crumbling, moss-covered log—the growth of centuries—and gazed keenly around him in every direction. He presented a strange adjunct to that wild scene, and yet one not unattractive.

As might be inferred from the words of his grumbling companion, Dick Worley, Bonnett was tall—unusually so, in fact, and yet his figure was not without a certain grace of its own. There was an air of self-reliance in his demeanor, that could not fail but impress an observer.

His dress was that of a sailor—and even at that early period of our history, there was an unmistakable difference from the garb of a landsman—and made of the finest material. His blue jacket was thickly studded with round buttons of pure gold, each hanging from a link of the same precious metal. His trowsers, cut free and flowing, were of fine gray cloth, with gold lace at the outer seams. A glazed cap,

resting jauntily upon his head, was also marked with this insignia of rank. His well-formed feet were incased in gaiters of Spanish leather, curiously stamped.

One hand supported a short, heavy Dutch fusil, its butt resting on the log. In the silken sash at his waist were visible the richly-chased hilt of a curved dirk, and a brace of brass-barreled pistols.

His features were not repulsive, and only for a cold, stern look in his black eyes, and about the rigidly-closed lips, would have been considered handsome. His hair, black as jet, hung in masses about his shoulders. A heavy mustache and pointed beard of like color, adorned his face.

As Bonnett turned slowly around, it could be seen that he possessed more than an ordinary share of muscular power, united to great suppleness.

We have been thus particular in describing this man, because he was a noted character in the Colonial times of which this story treats, and will play a prominent part before the reader.

His companion was short, but of an unusually massive and muscular build. His round, closely-cropped head, and bull-neck set squarely upon his shoulders, yet giving him almost the appearance of deformity.

His garb was much the same as that of Steed Bonnett, displaying the same richness of quality and adornments. But now they were sadly frayed and tattered by the stubborn briars and bushes through which he had lately blundered.

Through these rents, his hairy skin was visible, marked with many a crimsoned scratch.

His weapons also resembled those of the other, and he bore them with the air of one well versed in their use.

"Come, Worley, are you ready?" cried Bonnett, leaping lightly to the ground.

"To 'bout ship and sail for clear water? Yes!"

"No, not yet. You forget our mission. But cheer up. We're 'most to the end of our cruise. Come."

"Devil roast me, Master Bonnett, if I don't half-believe you mean me foul!" suspiciously muttered Worley.

"Foul? Don't be a fool, Bully Dick," contemptuously replied Bonnett. "If I did, I'd work my will without so much

trouble—ay, and on the deck of your own Bonita, too, for that matter. However, if you doubt, veer about and make sail; I can work without ye.”

“ ’Tis easy saying that, but how am I to do it? Tell me that! None but the devil himself could keep his reckoning after so much blind tacking!”

“ I can.”

“ True—the devil or Steed Bonnett. ’Twould take a smarter logician than I to point out the difference. But heave ahead. I’m in for it now, and I will see it out.”

With a short laugh, Steed Bonnett turned and strode forward at a rapid pace, followed by his comrade, who puffed and panted with the exertion, venting his discontent in sonorous curses and unique oaths, greatly to the amusement of his leader. But presently, with a stern air, Bonnett turned and spoke:

“ Best keep that unruly tongue close ’twixt thy lips, Master Worley. One would think an army was marching through the wilderness, were he guided by ear alone. The spot where we are to meet the heathen in treaty is close at hand, and as you may have heard say, they are suspicious rascals. Check thy cursing, and bear in mind that I am to do the talking.”

“ I’m willing. I don’t understand their lingo. But the beauties—will we meet *them*?”

“ No; I was only jesting. We will only meet with the head chiefs of the different tribes. But silence.”

Grumbling still, but ’twixt his teeth, Worley followed his comrade, assuring himself that his weapons were ready for instant use. In a few minutes more, Bonnett paused and glanced around him.

Then, as if satisfied, he produced a small silver whistle and sounded a long, clear note, terminating in a peculiar quaver. Like an echo, there came an answer precisely similar, though evidently produced without such aid.

“ Hold! you headstrong idiot!” angrily muttered Bonnett, as Worley threw forward his fusil. “ It is one of those we came to hold treaty with. Would you bid them clap a noose round our necks, that you act in such a manner?”

Worley glanced suspiciously at the approaching figure, but

lowered his gun, though still holding it ready for speedy action. Bonnett turned to meet the savage.

This was a tall, well-formed specimen of the Indian of that day. That perfect understanding was between the two, there could be no doubt, from the cordial manner in which they greeted each other.

What passed, Worley could only surmise, as the words spoken were in a dialect strange to him. Then Bonnett faced around and uttered :

"It is all well, Worley. The chiefs are waiting for us. Come ; and remember what I told you."

Grumbling still, Dick followed the two men. A brief tramp brought them to a small glade, in which were standing more than a half a score Indians.

After a brief scrutiny, they saluted the two white men with gravity but evident friendliness. That this was but a continuance of some previous meeting, was plain, from there being so little time wasted in preliminaries, Bonnett at once entering upon the subject.

"Chiefs and brothers ! You all know why we are gathered here in council. Have you thought well upon my words ? Have you decided upon what trail to follow ? Let me hear your words, that I may know what to tell my master, the one who would be your father—the great and good king of Spain !"

As he turned to seat himself, Bonnett heard Worley whisper :

"What was that—what outlandish gibberish were you mouthing ? Devil wrap me up in a sand-storm if I understand all this !"

"Peace—you will soon see."

The savage who had just met with the pale-faces, an old and battle-scarred chief of the Creeks, now arose. A careless gesture sufficed to free his chest of the loose robe, that fell at his feet.

His eyes slowly wandered around upon the faces of those composing the council. Then, turning once more to the white men, he spoke :

"Brothers—children of our great White Father. We have thought long upon your words, and they are good. They

gladden the hearts of the red-men, for your tongue speaks of war. • Once—and the mind of Cholucullah can still bring back that day—the time was when we would have laughed loudly at the idea of asking help to drive the Long-knives back into the salt water. But now—we bow our heads and are thoughtful.

“We were many, then. Now we are few, while they are like the forest-leaves. Sun by sun they grow stronger. They push further from the water. Their axes let daylight into the forest—their voices are so loud that the deer grow frightened and run far away. And the red-men, too, are melting away before them. •

“Where now are the Westos, the Stonos, the Seeweas? Gone—swept away by the might of the Long-knives! Where are the Tuscaroras? Ask the Long-knives! The Yamasees? Gone! Where are the Coosaws? I look around me—I see but one; a young chief. Only one, when before the Long-knives came, the council-fires were crowded with their wise men.

“Brothers, all this have the Long knives wrought! Shall they do more? Shall the Creeks, the Catawbas, the Cherokees—shall all the tribes whose chiefs I now see, sit still with empty hands and bowed heads, until the Long-knives send them to find their friends in the spirit land?

“No! Rather let us rise up as one warrior and sweep the pale-faced invaders back into the salt water, over which they came!

“Let us send our women and children back into the forest, while we meet our foes face to face, hand to hand, and drink their blood. The great chief of these braves will help us. Then, when this land is all our own, we will sign the treaty that makes us all brothers. We will keep the lands of our fathers, and the good chief can live in the land of flowers. •

“Brothers, Cholucullah has spoken.”

The old chief sat down, and for a minute all was silence. Worley looked on with ill concealed uneasiness, but the countenance of Bonnett was composed, though joy and satisfaction filled his eyes.

One after another, the chiefs arose and expressed their

views. With one exception, their voices were for war, bitter and exterminating.

Steed Bonnett then arose. He spoke in the Creek dialect, with which all except the stumpy semin were well acquainted.

"Brothers! My heart is very glad that the eyes of the chiefs have been opened wide to the truth. I will speak glad words in the ear of my father when I go back to him. He will laugh. His heart will be very glad.

"Brothers! He bids me tell you that if this treaty was made, he would send his red children many guns and knives much ammunition and many bright bracelets. He would send his red children cloth and beads and paint; every thing that could please their hearts, both for braves and women. He would make you very rich. All he asks is for you to help him slay the Longknives—your enemies as well as his.

"This is all he asks—but I ask something. Some of you know me. I have a big war canoe, with thunder guns and many men. I will help you fight, but I must have some pay. You get all this land—all the weapons and cattle of the Longknives. What shall I get?

"Listen. There are many men of skin like night, among the Longknives. They are cowards, but they are good for work. They have no scalps, so you will not kill them. I ask all that you take captive. Will you give them to me?"

A murmur of assent ran around the circle. Bonnett smiled.

"Good! But that is not all—there is more that I wish. There is one singing-bird among those who have settled by the dark river, who is very dear to the heart of your brother. She must be mine—my lodge is very dark without her. For her and for the black man, then, I will help you with my war canoe. This is all I ask."

Bonnett fell back, and the old Creek chief arose.

"It is good. The white squaw shall go to the lodge of our brother. But how will we know her?"

"The chief who lives in the settlement?"

"Yes."

"Then he knows the man who keeps the lodge where trav-

elers stop? The big white house before which stands a tall pole, holding up a man and a snake, fighting?"

"Yes—we know."

"Good! It is his child that I wish. The young squaw with the yellow hair, and voice like that of the Laughing Bird."

During this conversation there had been at least one interested listener among the savages. That was the young chief whose voice had been raised for peace, Silence, the Coosaw.

As Steed Bonnett proceeded, his face became clouded, and one hand convulsively clutched the tomahawk at his girdle. His eyes glittered ominously, and his lithe form half arose, crouching like the subtle panther, whose prey is unsuspectingly approaching its covert.

Dick Worley noted all this by-play, with his ever-suspicious glance. He coolly cocked his fusil and brought it forward in a position ready for use.

"Ware hawks, Steed," he muttered, in a guarded tone. "Look out! One of the heathen yonder is making ready to board ye!"

Bonnett quickly saw the threatening action, but did not move, other than to let one hand slowly drop to the pistol at his belt. Then, as Chokacallin sat down, the Coosaw spring forward.

He was a magnificent specimen of the wildwood warrior. Young as he was—scarcely twenty five—his form was a model of athletic grace and power. His features were strongly marked, but yet not unharmonious. Of his character, let the future pages speak.

"It is *not* well!" he cried, in a deep, defiant tone. "No! it is not good. The white-chiefs ask too much. Let them take the negroes if he will. But he shall not have the Laughing Bird with the yellow hair. A chief has said R—Silence, the Coosaw!"

The eyes of the seaman flashed angrily, but he restrained his emotions, wonderfully. In a cool tone he uttered:

"My ears hear a voice, but it sounds strange, because, it speaks for peace. Who is it that says the great Chokacallin shall eat his words?"

‘It is I—I, Silence, the Coosaw! I say that the Singing Bird the white-face speaks of shall never be his. She is mine—Silence says it!’ hotly replied the young chief, half drawing his hatchet.

“Chief,” said Bennett, turning from the Coosaw with a contemptuous gesture, “your ears are open? Can Cholucullah speak with the crooked tongue? He has said that I might have the white squaw—will he now eat his own words?”

“No! Cholucullah only speaks one way. She shall be yours.”

“And Silence swears by the Great Spirit that she shall *not* be his. Let the white dog beware! The Coosaw will eat his heart—will drink his blood! Let him beware!” shouted the young chief, as he turned and strode away from the spot, leaving the party not a little surprised at this sudden disturbance, as well as at the audacity of the Coosaw.

After this episode there was but little more delay. One by one the chiefs added their totems to the strip of buck skin produced.

The Creek placed the totem of his tribe—a hissing viper coiled under a bush. The three divisions of the Cherokee: a great bird, a bear, and a wolf. The Savannah, a tree snake. The Alatomaha, a green leaf. The Catawba, a mocking bird. The Saluda, a waterfall. The Santee, a canoe-man traversing a tangled swamp, with pole instead of paddle. The Chickasaw, a pine tree. The Winshaw, a terrapin; with several others, representing bands of lesser importance.

After this there was but little of moment accomplished. The time had not yet come for sterner measures, save in speech.

The treaty was made, but yet required the sign of Bennett’s master, and their first blow at the colonists was not to be dealt until after the promised goods had been delivered into the hands of the Indians. And so, after some little discussion, the council broke up.

Dick Worley gave a long-brawn sigh of relief, as the last chief disappeared, and then arose, saying:

“May the devil grill me alive, Sterd Bennett, if you ever ~~log~~log me into another cruise ’mongst the heathen savages!

My head still itches from their venomous looks. And those copper-colored beauties, eh? Where are they?"

"All in good time, Bully Dick, all in good time," laughed his comrade, in apparent high good humor over the successful issue of his intricate plottings. "We must make another trip for that. These dusky heathen stand on punctilio quite as much as do our most dainty Court beauties."

"Another cruise! Devil comb my hair! Another cruise like this? No, no, my master; though Dick Worley be a rare gallant 'mongst the petticoats, he'll none o' that! Let the heathen go—Bully Dick will stick to his own color, then, where 'tis plain sailing."

Thus conversing, the two pirates—for such in good sooth they were—made their way slowly and laboriously along through the tangled forest, on their return to their vessels. But they were destined to meet with another startling interruption on their route, that still further increased the aversion entertained by Master Worley for his new acquaintances, the heathen savages.

Steed Bonnett was standing upon the trunk of a large fallen tree, gazing keenly around, slightly bewildered and in doubt as to the correct route. His keen vision stood him in good stead just then.

A cry burst from his lips, and quick as thought he flung himself forward from the tree-trunk, falling flat upon his face. Worley, who was sitting astride the log, uttered a cry of astonishment.

However, he was speedily enlightened as to the cause of this strange action. Even as Bonnett sprang forward, a splendid report was heard, and Worley distinguished the vicious hissing of a bullet as it hurtled by above his head.

Bewildered by the sudden attack, the stumpy pirate stood wildly around him, with mouth wide agape, though he had instinctively cocked his carbine. A tiny curl of light smoke betrayed the point from whence had sped the ambushed shot, and then a dastly figure was seen gliding rapidly away.

Dick Worley was far from being a coward, when confronting a tangible danger, and throwing up his fist, he sent a bullet after the retreating figure. The only reply it elicited was a single shrill whoop of defiant exultation.

Worley sprung to the ground, with the evident intention of making pursuit, when he was checked by the voice of his comrade. Turning, he saw Bonnett arise to his feet.

"Hold! Dick, don't be a fool, man. Let the varlet go for this time. You could not overhail him. 'Twould be like setting a Dutch galiot to catch the Albatross, or your own Bonita."

"Didst see the scoundrel, Steed? Devil fry me, but burnt powder is no new scent in his nostrils! See! but for my adroit twist, the heathen's bullet would have cut something more precious than this bit of gold lace," cried Dick, fingering his frayed jacket.

"Bah! thy tongue is braver than thy whole body else, Bully Dick," sneered Bonnett. "'Twas at me the varlet aimed; and but for my doubt as to the course, there would have been a vote cast for another chief on board my good Albatross. See—a hole through my cap and a love-lock from my skull! Close work; but never mind. I measured the heathen and the next will be mine. The Coosaws will mourn a chief when next we meet," and a dark frown distorted the features of the pirate chieftain.

CHAPTER II.

"MERIT-NO-EVIL" MEEKFACE."

CASTAL mention has been made of the "settlement by the dark river," so termed by Steed Bonnett, the pirate chieftain. To it must we now turn.

It was but a small colony, numbering barely two hundred inhabitants, all told, situated near the mouth of what was then termed Black River, from the peculiar hue of its turbid waters. Being, as it was, so exposed to the visits of hostile savages, a goodly sized fort or block house, surrounded by palisades, had been erected, and more than once during the brief existence of the colony, had this refuge proved their safety.

Next in size to this structure was a large, substantial tavern, before which hung a quaint sign, portraying the legend of St. George and the dragon. Surrounding this were a number of less pretentious dwellings.

Very few people were abroad upon the street—if such it might be called—but a close observer would have been struck by one peculiarity of the settlers—the vast difference in both garb and demeanor, between those who, otherwise, seemed to occupy the same rank in life; a difference peculiar and thorough.

In truth the settlers might, with propriety, be divided into two different sects or races—those of Cavaliers and Round-heads, or Puritans. Though, by nature of their surroundings, they were forced to mingle together more or less familiarly, there was ever an undercurrent of dislike and jealousy stirring up their baser passions, until, more than once, their bickerings had culminated in the clash of cold steel, wielded by strong and willing hands.

The Puritans, as a rule, were sober, morose and inflexible people, opposed to almost every kind of amusement, rigid in forms, and very tenacious regarding those leveling opinions held in especial dislike by the pleasure-loving Cavaliers. They denounced the vices and debaucheries of the latter, their freedom of deportment and ill-timed levities. Being repaid in like coin, the Puritans labored assiduously to keep the Cavaliers out of power, and to abridge their influence and authority.

The Cavaliers were scarcely less active in their hostility, nor less careful to display their dislike. They ridiculed with an unsparing wit, and stigmatized each "crop-ear" as a sly, deceitful hypocrite, at whose door should be laid all the evils and misfortunes of the past age.

These two classes, then, in nearly equal numbers, composed the colony settled upon the spot spoken of, and as a natural consequence, street broils were of no infrequent occurrence. Why we have been thus circumstantial, may become apparent ere long.

It was several days subsequent to the forest treaty, that we turn to the tap-room of the "George." Though the outer doors are open, a huge fire blazes merrily in the great fire-

place, casting a broad glare of light over the sanded floor, the white walls and the shining pewter mugs behind the counter.

A goodly company is scattered around the large room, and honest Thomas Bryant smiles benignantly upon his patrons as he leans carelessly upon the well-polished counter. Tall, solid, well built and still handsome, despite the gray that sprinkles his once nut-brown hair, Bryant was far different from what one naturally pictures an innkeeper to be. Bachelors he was, and a model one, too, as every Cavalier in the settlement vowed; and several robust young Puritans, also, though perhaps the fair Alice, his daughter, had not a little to do with this last phase.

It lacked but a short time of sunset, when a horseman rode rapidly up to the inn door, and dismounting, entered the tap-room. Naturally all eyes were directed toward him, with a greater or less degree of interest.

He paused just over the threshold, and coolly surveyed the company. Standing thus, outlined against the sunset sky, with the broad sheen of the firelight playing over his form, the stranger presented a striking picture.

He was very tall, of a spare build, yet with a goodly share of toughened muscles. His garb was sombre black, through and through, so far as visible, for the long riding coat was buttoned closely to his throat.

His face was thin and rather long, being smooth-shaven, while his hair was close-cropped. There was a peculiar expression of sanctimonious austerity resting upon every feature, and coldly glancing from his large black eyes. This, added to his garb, plainly pronounced his creed; none could possibly mistake him for other than a Puritan, or rather, when coupled with the sword and pistols at his belt, and a vague military air, a Roundhead.

At one of the tables were seated several gayly-attired young men, whose bearded faces and long, curling locks, proclaimed them of the Cavaliers. One, a handsome youth, turned from his serving of the traveler with a sneer, saying, in an audible tone:

"But another of the caving hypocrites! Fill up, comrades, and drink eternal confusion to the renegades!"

A boisterous laugh followed this speech, and as the glasses

clinked musically, a flash passed over the stranger's face, and his eyes flashed angrily. But then turning toward Bryant, he spoke, in a deep, full tone, that arrested more than one ear among the revelers.

"I fear me this is an ungodly inn, but nevertheless I must e'en risk it. Have my faithful beast attended to, and see that he be not cooled off too quickiy."

"Very well sir, but," and Bryant dropped his tone, as he added with a peculiar glance, "shall I not show you to a private chamber? It may not suit you here; you see the lads are rather wild and not over choice with their words."

"All in good time, Master host," coolly replied the traveler, not altering his tone. "Though but an humble servant of the Lord, I have faced many a more dangerous gathering, without coming to harm. I will enjoy the fire for a time, for verily, the cold sea-breeze hath chilled me to the bone."

The Paritan strode toward the fireplace, but as he passed by where were seated the Cavaliers already alluded to, one of them suddenly stretched out a foot, over which the stranger stumbled, nearly falling to the floor. A loud, boisterous laugh greeted this, as the Paritan regained his balance and glanced hastily around.

One hand grasped the stout sword-hilt, as if instinctively, and a fiery glare filled the black eyes, but then with a visible effort he removed his hand. His voice was low and clear as he spoke:

"Young sir, methinks your legs are over long and may get you into trouble. Luckily I am not of a hasty temperament, else a surgical experiment might have remedied the deformity."

The gesture that accompanied this speech was too significant to be misunderstood, and the young man to whom it was addressed, sprang to his feet with an angry cry. But a strong hand upon his shoulder pressed him back into a chair, while a low voice muttered in his ear:

"Lightly, Harcourt, lightly! A brawl here will bring us neither pleasure nor profit. Let me answer the impudent varlet."

These words had not been so guarded but that the quick ear of the stranger caught their meaning, and his full black

eyes rested upon the speaker. A peculiar change came over his features, and he shrunk back a pace, as if involuntarily.

And yet it was a handsome face and a comely figure upon which he gazed. A form, tall, muscular and graceful, garbed in a rich suit. A face, frank, open and generous, though evidently that of one who possessed a hasty and ardent temperament.

"So, my master," added the young man, turning his gaze upon the traveler. "You are over quick to hint at sword-play, because of a mere accident, that might have been avoided by a little care."

"Was it an accident? In my eyes it looked otherwise."

"How now? You doubt my words?"

"Nay; your memory, rather. I am no street brawler, to scent a quarrel in a wink or a sneeze; nevertheless, this is an ill country for one to traverse, if he fears the sheen of lured steel. I am a poor follower of the Lord, and it ill be- seems me to loast, but this would not be the first time that gentlemen of your dress have forced me to bare steel in self-defense," quietly replied the Puritan.

"And yet you live?" sneered another of the Cavaliers
"Thy ears are still—"

"Peace!" uttered the gentleman described, Henry Howland, as the Puritan's eyes glittered, angrily. "Your name, kind master?"

"The chosen call me Merit-no-evil Meekface," slowly replied the stranger.

A loud burst of laughter followed the announcement of this name, lightened by the contrast between it and the rather belligerent stand assumed by its owner. The threatened storm bade fair to blow over, and probably would, only for the wine-maddened Cavalier who had begun the affair.

"Bah! white-livered in names as in character. Out upon thee, crop-eared var—"

This insolent speech was promptly checked. One swift stride brought the Puritan beside the table, and then a viciously delivered buffet lifted the cavalier from his chair, hurling him half-way across the room.

"Take that, thou foul-mouthed malignant, and learn to

keep thy scurvy epithets for such as merit them better than I," sternly cried Meekface, his features flushed with anger.

A fierce tumult uprose at this action, and the metallic clash of steel filled the tap room. Chairs and tables were upset; voices rung out in wild confusion.

Meekface sprung back and drew his long sword, with eyes flashing brilliantly, and lips curled from the closely-set white teeth. His cool and prompt action told that the boist'rous fellow had been no idle one.

"Peace, gentlemen, peace!" cried Bryant, springing out from the bar, and seeking to quell the disturbance. "Come this way, Master Meekface; your life is in peril here. In my private rooms you will be safe," at the same time endeavoring to draw the Puritan from the tap room.

"Nay, not so," was the cool reply. "Turn your words toward yonder men. I sought no quarrel, but if they force one upon me, be sure I will not flee it. They will learn that the 'crop-eared malignant' knows how to defend himself!"

"Hold there, comrades—back, I say!" shouted Howland, as his bared blade beat down several sword-points that were leveled against Meekface. "For shame! Six of ye upon one man! Back, there—back, or by 'r Lady, you must deal with me as well!"

"Out of the way, Howland," hoarsely cried the one whom Meekface had stricken down. "Stand aside, lest I should forget you were once a friend, and do you harm. The base-born hound has struck me—only his heart's blood can wipe out the insult. Stand aside, I say!"

"Give the boy his will, Master Howland. His hot blood needs cooling," sneered Meekface.

"No, Charles, not now. Wait until morning. You are too greatly excited, and he would have you at a disadvantage," whispered Howland.

"No—now!"

"Let me take your place, then."

"No more; stand aside," fumed the Cavalier.

"No, not now; or, if now, gentlemen, you will please step outside to the grass plot. You have disgraced my house enough for one time," sternly uttered Thomas Bryant, as his stout sword interposed.

"A duel—a duel!" cried several, and then the tap room was quickly vacated; for though such an event was far from being uncommon, it never failed to interest all, both young and old.

In an instant the room was empty of life, and arrangements for the duel were rapidly progressing. But prompt as was this, the raging anger of the young Cavalier found vent in hot and biting words.

Meekface stood a little to one side, leaning upon his sword, a sneering smile curling his lip. More than one of the opposite party, now that excitement had in a measure overcome the bewildering fumes of strong drink, cast wondering and even uneasy glances toward the stranger.

Despite themselves, this cool insolence awed their spirits. It told them that one used to arms would confront their comrade, and there was—to their sight—an evil glitter in his eyes that meant mischief.

"All ready there? Stand aside!" gritted Harcourt.

"But the seconds?"

"Never mind them—you can all act as such, if you desire. It is *to the death*, remember!" with a burning glare toward Meekface.

"Draw back a little, good sirs, and let the hot blood come on. 'Tis a pity to soil such brave garments, but since he will have it so, blame me not!" muttered the Puritan.

"Boast whilst thou can, foul-mouthed crop-eat!" cried Harcourt, as he sprang forward; and then, with a vicious clash, the two blades crossed.

"As I boast, gentle babe, so will I perform. Mutter a prayer to Satan, thy master, for I see some of your comrades are longing to test my skill, and I would not disappoint them," sneered Meekface, while coolly, and with apparent ease, he withstood Harcourt's impetuous attack.

The crowd had increased considerably in numbers, and was now composed of two different clans, as it were—Cavalier and Puritan, who naturally sided with the champion of their party, though as yet only in thought. But none could tell at what moment this seeming peace might be broken, when a duel would culminate in a free fight.

With a fierce snarl, rather than cry, Harcourt sprang to the

attack. Firm as a rock stood Meekface, his white teeth shining as his lip curled with derision, while the slender blades twined and twisted around each other like serpents in a deadly embrace.

Thrust after thrust Harcourt gave, but the slender sword in the Puritan's hand seemed a wall of steel, impossible to penetrate. Even the Cavaliers, while longing for his discomfiture, were forced to admire Meekface's marvelous skill.

For nearly a minute this was kept up, Meekface standing wholly upon the defensive, motionless in his tracks, only his wrist and forearm moving. But then came a change.

"*Now !*" hissed the Puritan, as he, in turn, began to attack.

A simultaneous cry of wonder burst from the lips of several of the spectators. In vain their eyes sought to trace the movements of the stranger's sword. Instead of two, there appeared a dozen glittering blades in full play.

A hollow, gasping groan told that the end had come. Then one sword clattered to the ground; a blood-stained form staggered back into the arms of a youth, from whose lips broke a cry of agony.

It was the form of Harcourt. His brother gently lowered the corpse to the ground, as his friends came crowding around.

"Poor Charlie," muttered Howland, "he's dead!"

"Dead? Oh, no! not dead — say he will still live?" moaned the stripling, as with trembling hands he tore the gore-stained garments open and bared the fallen man's breast to the air.

One glance showed all that they stood in the presence of death. Directly over the heart was where the cruel blade had entered. The Puritan's hand had not played him false.

As the truth became evident, a wild, significant cry arose: a cry of *blood for blood!* and bright steel flashed forth in the red glare of the setting sun, upon every hand.

"Kill him! Down with the crop-eared murderer! *Vengeance for Harcourt!*"

Meekface heard their shouts with unmoved front, save that his grasp tightened upon the sword-hilt, while a prick-

ball filled his left hand. That he possessed undaunted courage, no one could doubt.

"Hold! do not be rash, friends," cried Howland. "Listen to me."

His commanding voice was obeyed, and perhaps 'twas well, for on seeing their champion threatened, half a score Perinthians had ranged themselves beside him, weapons in hand. It was a critical moment in the annals of the colony; one word might end in its destruction.

"Thank you, friends," said Meckface, gratefully. "I wished the youth no ill, but he forced the quarrel upon me. He sought my life, and in self-defense forced me to take his. I am a man of peace—unless first assaulted."

"He is right, comrades," added Howland. "He has done no more than any one of us would have done in his place. It was a fair duel."

"And is he to go free after this? Can he murder poor Harcourt and then ride away to boast of it?" hotly demanded one.

"I didn't say so, comrade," and Howland smiled—a peculiar smile, full of meaning. "I didn't say that. It is my turn now. Sir stranger, since your hand is in, will you fight me? Or must I serve you as you did yon poor fellow—deal you a belated fist, to rouse your courage?"

"Nay, young hot-blood, were you to attempt that, you might fare the worse. Though a man of peace, the battle-spirit of my father, who fought those of my ilk at Marston Moor, would scarce brook that. If you are eager for a bout, I shall not balk your will, though you are over young to sigh for such a death," coolly replied the Perintan, his eye glowing.

"Words cost but little, and perhaps 'tis as well that you talk now—you may not have the breath to spare, ere long. Though so young, I trust you will find me no babe. Your guard, sir?"

"Stop! Howland, stand aside—you shall not usurp my place," cried young Harcourt, springing up from his brother's corpse. "I claim the right to avenge my brother's death. No, it is useless—I will fight him!"

"Eugene, think," whispered Howland. "You are no

match for him when at the best, and now, while you are so excited, it would be sheer murder. I say you shall not fight him!"

"And I will—I *must*!"

A general cry arose against this, for all knew how such an affair must end. The boy—for he was not more—would only rush to his death.

"Come!" impatiently cried Meekface. "Your decision, and quick. Though inclined to favor your will, I am travel worn and hungered. If nothing but sword play will satisfy you, I stand ready to gratify the desire, but otherwise, I am willing to let the matter drop."

After a brief consultation with the Cavaliers, Howland spoke:

"It must drop, for this day, since Harcourt claims the right. But remember, sir, with the morning, you must meet either this gentleman or myself, if only to answer for your insolent boasts. He claims the right, but is not fit for the trial now."

"As you will," carelessly replied Meekface. "Arrange the meeting or meetings as you please. You will find me at my chamber. And now, with your leave," bowing low, with mock courtesy, the tall Puritan turned and entered the inn.

As Howland glanced after him, he caught sight of a figure standing just within a door leading to the private rooms of the innkeeper's family, and in obedience to a gesture, he glided forward. There was a look upon his fine face that could not be mistaken.

The figure was that of a maiden, not yet twenty, lithe, graceful and comely. It was the "yellow-haired singing-lad," spoken of by Steed Bonnett, Alice Bryant, only child of Thomas Bryant, the innkeeper. A blonde of perfect type, the "fair Alice" was generally acknowledged the beauty of the colony. Though not so generally understood, Henry Howland was her accepted suitor.

This tragedy occasioned not a little excitement among the colonists, though all agreed that Meekface had only defended himself, and was not to be blamed for doing so. Some of the people were secretly glad that the affair had ended thus, for Harcourt, especially in his cups, was a quarrelsome person,

and one that not even a friend could trust then, with certainty.

The corpse was carried up to Howland's chamber, as the two brothers had been alone in the world, having no other living relatives. Here several of the Cavaliers, including Howland, were to watch through the night.

But the watch was destined to be disturbed, and the night to become once more the scene of uproar and confusion.

A clear, still scream broke the dead stillness, terminating in a choking gurgle as though of one strangling.

The voice, unmistakably, was that of a woman; the point whence it sounded was evidently in that portion of the house used as chambers by the innkeeper's family.

"'Tis Alice—'tis her voice!" cried Howland, springing to his feet, clutching sword and pistols. "Quick, men, follow me—there's devilry afoot!"

At lightning speed the Cavalier rushed along the dark passage, but a long residence at the inn had rendered every turn familiar to the young man. He was heading toward the spot whence had rung out the appeal for help, though now all was still, save the clamor of the servants below.

Another voice sounded forth at this juncture; and closely following it came a sharp report, as of a pistol. Such indeed it was, for as Howland burst into the chamber he saw the innkeeper leaning out the window, his head in a stroke-wreath.

"What's the matter—what is it, Bryant?" cried Henry.

"Alice—they've stolen her!" gasped the father. "Look! I shot ere—see! There is Alice, fainting, and one of the devils making toward her! My God! they will carry her off!" groaned Bryant, half-distracted.

"No, we will save her. Quick, comrades—all who are gentlemen of honor, follow me!" cried Howland, as he recklessly leaped from the window, alighting in safety upon the moist ground, closely followed by the other Cavaliers.

Alice was lying upon the ground, beside a groaning wretch, whom the innkeeper's bullet had stricken down, even in the moment of success. Beyond there, coming up from the beach, were perhaps half a score of others, habited similarly to the

stricken man, brandishing their weapons as if to intimidate the Cavaliers.

Alice raised her head and once more cried aloud for help. Howland sprung to her side, and in hasty words assured her of safety.

"Beware, Henry!" shrieked Alice, her voice trembling with horror.

Howland turned just in time to ward off a vicious thrust, but else would have run him through the body. A cry of wonder broke from his lips as the moonlight fell full athwart the face of his assailant.

"The Puritan—Meekface!"

"Puritan no longer, my fighting-cock," sneered the other, as his sword played rapidly around Howland's guard; "let Captain Steed Bonnett, at your service!"

"The pirate!"

"Ay, so men term me. But look ye, boy, give way, 'fore I send you to keep your young friend company. You spoke like a gentleman when I was hard threatened, and I would not have your blood upon my hands. Give way, then, while 'tis time."

"And for what? That you may carry this lady from her home and people? Bah! do thy best—'tis only hastening our duel," sneered the Cavalier.

Scarcely a minute had elapsed since the alarming shot, and now the sound of voices, running from house to house, told that the entire settlement was aroused. The pirates, only five in number besides their leader, knew that to remain would be fatal, and with one accord, they turned and fled toward the beach, Steed Bonnett bringing up the rear, shouting as he ran:

"Baffled, for once; but do not exult. Mistress Alice shall yet be my bride!"

Howland, with others, gained the beach, just too late. A boat was rapidly gliding out into the darkness cast by the moon's set, and a taunting laugh filled their ears, as the dusky outline faded into nothingness.

There was but scant sleep at the inn during the remainder of that night. Alice was called upon to relate her story a score of times, meager though it was.

She had been awakened by being lifted bodily from bed, wrapped in a coverlet, and freeing her mouth, she cried aloud for help. Her abductors handed her to a comrade without, and then sprung down. As her father fired the fatal shot, she half-swooned.

By this time all knew that Merit no evil Mockface was none other than the infamous pirate captain, Steed Bonnett, in cunning disguise. But only to Thomas Bryant did Howland tell the last threat of the desperado.

Young Harcourt was nearly frantic with rage and grief, when he found that his brother's murderer had escaped his vengeance.

CHAPTER III.

RED DAN'S RACE FOR LIFE.

"God's mercy! Red Dan, are thy legs made of steel, that thou canst travel at breakneck speed forever, without tiring? Spirit o' love, man, pause and let me catch breath!"

"'Tis scarcely time for that, yit, Master Harry," chuckled the man addressed as Red Dan. "Runnin' water leaves no time, an' we must put the drink atween us an' the varmint's afore thinkin' o' rest. The imps mean devilry, or they'd never be a followin' Red Dan in such a sneakin' manner. But quiet down, until I kin find the bark. 'Tis hereabouts, I know."

It was several days subsequent to the events narrated in the preceding chapter, and in the "Master Harry," we recognize Henry Howland, though a second place might be assigned him, owing to the great change in his attire. Then, he was a gay, dashing Cavalier; now he seemed the simple wood-ranger.

A coarse though neat suit of woolen and tanned skins formed his garb; a fur cap rests upon his head, a pair of plain moccasins covered his feet. A short-barreled rifle of goodly caliber, with richly ornamented stock, a brace of pistols and a knife are the weapons he bore.

Red Dan, a celebrated character of the times, was a somewhat remarkable looking personage. In stature, he was extremely tall, of a lony, angular build, far from being graceful, but very active, adroit and muscular. Long hair and a shaggy beard of a fiery hue gave him the surnam of Red Dan, by which alone he was known to the settlers. His weapons were much the same as those borne by his countrymen, only less ornamented, and of heavier make.

The two men had been out upon a scout, for the purpose if practicable, of gaining an inkling to the real disposition of their savage neighbors, the settlers fearing that their long-growing discontent would culminate in another disastrous war. This was their second day out, and already they had gleaned enough to make them suspicious, though at the same time they had gathered no positive proof.

A couple of hours before, from the crest of a high hill, Red Dan had detected a small party of red-skins assiduously tracking him up, and wishing to avoid a collision, he had set off at a round pace, as hinted in the speech that heads this chapter.

"Come on, Harry," called out the old scout, from the river-bank. "The bark's here, an' the sooner we cross over, the sooner we'll have rest."

"I'd rather stay and fight the skulking heathens," grumbled Howland, as he arose. "This fleeing is not to my taste."

"Every thin' in its own place, ye know," chuckled Red Dan. "Jest now, ran's our motto. 'Twon't do to get in a scrimmage 'th the heathens jest yit. We must look to the Creek village first. Thar, ef anywhar, we'll see their trail showed out plain. Be easy, lak. Ef it's war, be sure ye'll see a plenty o' fightin' 'fore it's did with, I promise ye that. I'm not much on the run myself, when I kin git round it. But step in—keerful, boy! ye'll upset the canoe ef ye don't mind."

"An egg-shell, rather!" muttered Howland, as he took a position in the stern of the frail bark.

Then Red Dan dextrously plied his paddle, sending the boat over the water with the speed of a race-horse. He turned up-stream, and while nearing the further shore, aimed so as to land a goodly distance above the point of departure.

A few yards only separated them from land, when a score of dusky figures abruptly sprung out into full view upon the bank, and halted them. Red Dan instantly backed water, while Howland cocked and half raised his rifle.

"Stop! Don't shoot for your life, don't shoot!" hurriedly muttered the old scout, as the metallic click met his ear. "A notion 'd be our death. Mebbe they don't mean us harm. Make like you b'lieved them good friends; 't's our only show."

One of the savages again called out, and Red Dan replied in the same dialect, at the same time paddling in toward shore.

"What does he say?" whispered Henry.

"It's the Creek chief, Cholucullah. He says come ashore—he wants to see us."

There was no time for further communication, for the boat touched shore, where it was seized by half a dozen hands and securely held while the white men stepped forth.

As Howland gazed around upon the scowling faces, and noted the evil looks cast upon them, he almost regretted not having offered resistance ere thus falling completely into **their power.**

The two scouts were not disarmed, but one glance showed how little that fact would avail them, did the savages indeed mean them foul. Over a score of brawny braves stood close around, and with one movement they could have overwhelmed the pale-faces beyond the possibility of resistance.

Red Dan's face wore a calm, inscrutable look as he turned toward the Creek chief, Cholucullah. His voice gave little token of the misgivings that filled his heart.

"The voice of a great warrior sounded in my ear. It said soon. Fire Scalp is eyed, because the voice was that of a hunter. He is here. Will Cholucullah say why he stopped the journey of his brother?"

The chief gazed closely at Red Dan for a moment, then, turning aside, he conferred with the other savages. That there were of various opinions, was easily surmised from their gestures, some of them not the most amicable.

Cholucullah turned and addressed the old scout.

"Fire Scalp is a great hunter, but is not his heart chang-

ing toward his red brothers? The time was when he would spend whole moons in the red man's lodge, teaching them how to shoot, to trail the wild beast, or how to throw dust in the eyes of their enemies. But now? All is changed. Fire Scalp comes no more to see his red friends. Why? Has his heart grown cold, or so small that his old friends are crowded out of it? It must be so, else he would gladden the heart of the Creek, by once more visiting his village."

"Cholucullah is very kind, and it does the heart of Fire Scalp good to know that he has so many true friends, who think of him and speak soft words when his back is turned. No, his heart has not grown small, nor is it so full that he never thinks of his friends. Often when the eyes of Fire Scalp are closed, his spirit takes the back trail and wanders as of old, through the wide forest with his red brothers. No, Fire Scalp does not forget."

"Fire Scalp remembers, and yet his moccasins wander wide of the village?"

"Cholucullah, you are a chief. Listen, and I will tell plain words. Does a Creek chief allow his thoughts to dwell upon love, when the war-cry of his enemy fills the air? Does he turn from the foe, to sit beside the maiden whom he loves, and listen to her soft voice until he's forgot the war-whoop and the scalp-cry? You are a chief—you say no. Good!"

"Fire Scalp is not a chief; but he is a brave of the pale-faces who come from beyond the salt water. His ear is very keen when he is listening for the good of his friends. He hears a war-whoop, sounding from afar off; the war-cry of the bad white people who live in the Land of Flowers. It threatens the safety of Fire Scalp's friends."

"A dream voice came to Fire Scalp in his sleep, and bade him go into the woods and seek for the great and good Cholucullah, and tell him this. The Spirit voice said that the Creek chief would prove a true friend, and would lend his brother help in driving back the bad white-faces. I obeyed the spirit—I am here!"

The countenance of Cholucullah changed curiously as he listened to this clearly delivered speech. Evidently he was placed in an unenviable position.

The reader knows the part he had already played in the

treaty with the King of Spain; and it may be added that this party was a delegation on its way to meet another envoy of the Spaniards.

He would most likely have allowed Red Dan and comrade to pass on, without La Harz, had there been any chance of their missing his trail, for he really felt a deep friendship for the old wood-ranger. But he knew that the trail would be observed, followed, and the truth of the treaty discovered; a discovery that might ruin all their hopes, coming before they were prepared for the attack.

For this reason he had intercepted the scout, resolved to detain him until too late for his aid to save the settlement.

"Fire Scalp did well to obey the dream-voice," said the chief, after a brief pause. "It spoke true words, when it said the red-men were friends. Fire Scalp will go with us to the village, and then he can look down into the Indian's heart, and go back to his people, to tell them what he has seen."

"Then Choluacullah has not listened to the evil voice—He still loves his white friends?"

"Yes; a chief can not lie. He will prove true to his white friends," evasively replied the chief, meaning the Spaniards.

"It is well! Fire Scalp will go and tell his people to be glad—that they need fear no one, now that Choluacullah is their friend."

"Yes—after Fire Scalp has visited the village."

"See! the sun is high up. The shadows are very short. The trail to my friends is a long one. They are very uneasy, and will think bad things if Fire Scalp stays long in the woods. Some other time he will visit his red brother—not now. Fire Scalp has a duty to perform," decisively replied Red Dan.

"My brother's mind is beneath a cloud," coldly added the savage. "He must go to the village. When he eats and sleeps, then he may return to his people. Choluacullah has spoken."

Red Dan hesitated. He knew—or firmly believed that the chief meant him false, but to betray this suspicion would be a signal for his death, should it be true. And yet he dared

not comply, for once there, he might be detained until too late to save his friends, who would naturally interpret his protracted absence as a token that all was well.

"Fire Scalp says he is a friend—let him prove it. He says that his heart has not changed. Good! Then he will visit his red brothers. If he will not go, then they will believe his tongue is crooked; that it says one thing, while his mind says another," added Cholucullah, significantly.

Red Dan saw that to hesitate longer would be worse than useless, and might prove fatal to his hopes; so, as though convinced, he signified his readiness to please his friend. Then as Cholucullah turned to one of his followers, the old scout whispered to Howland:

"The rumps air up to mischief. They mean to keep us captive, while pretendin' friendship. We must get free, or our friends air lost. You watch me an' do the best you know now. I'll make a break the first chance. If you kin, do the same, jest a' erwar! If you git back to the settlement, tell 'em the reds is up to deviltry ag'in."

There was time for no more, and the two scouts remained silent, watching every movement of their pretended friends. The consultation between the chiefs was brief, and then Cholucullah added:

"Fire Scalp and his young brave will go to the Creek village and wait there for Cholucullah. He will not be long away. Then we will eat, drink and smoke a treaty that shall last as long as water runs and the great sun shines."

Without waiting for a reply, the old chief, followed by several of his comrades, turned and strode off down the river, while the scouts were left in charge of the others. These marched over a dozen chosen graves, well armed and evidently carefully instructed in their duty.

The scouts kept a sharp eye on Red Dan as he moved with what care they were guarded, as they set out toward the Creek village, and the thought of escaping from such a guard was a vain one. If he could escape, he would have to do so before the village was but a few miles away, and he knew that, once there, escape would be an impossibility, without the consent of his guard. Whatever he designed must be wrought before then.

Fully decided, Red Dan was not one to hesitate long in putting his plans into execution, and he promptly seized upon the first opening. It was a desperate chance, and were the savages inclined to use their firearms, his death would be almost inevitable.

The party were journeying up the river bank, and owing to a sudden curve, came out close to the water's edge, or rather bank, for at this point the land was several yards higher than the level of the water. A quiet and meaning glance at Howland, told the latter that Red Dan was about to make a trial for freedom.

Without a sound, the powerful scout exerted his strength to the utmost, brushing the stalwart red-skins before him like blades of grass. Then, dropping his rifle, he clasped his hands above his head, and sprung out over the water, taking "a header" with an adroitness that told he was no stranger to the liquid element.

Not until the tall figure had disappeared beneath the water, did the savages seem to comprehend the occurrence, and for a moment then they appeared bewildered and undecided how to act. Red Dan had played his part well, and not for a moment had they suspected he was other than the blinded dope he seemed.

But then, as his fiery head appeared above the water, a dozen yards or more from the bank where they stood, wild yells of anger burst from their lips, and one brave after another sprang out into the troubled waters. They made no attempt to use their weapons, for Chohuenlah's orders had been strict, and they feared his anger should the tall scout be hurt.

It was a race, then, that must be decided solely upon the merits of the contestants. While breath and sight lasted, the savages would not give up the pursuit. It would be all their lives were worth to retain without their captive.

The old scout dove repeatedly, fearing a shot from shore, but then, as he heard the red-skins take to the water, he knew that they meant his capture rather than death, and exerted his skill to the utmost. Taking a diagonal course down-stream, in order to gain the current's aid, Red Dan clove the water with fishlike rapidity, gradually increasing

the distance between himself and the foremost of his pursuers.

In a very brief time he gained the shore, and with a defiant shout, sprung up the bank and darted away into the forest. Like hounds upon the reeking scent of a deer, the savages followed in pursuit, their voices ringing out at short intervals, still further increasing the similitude.

Red Dan felt not a little anxiety regarding the final result of his adventure. Not, however, on account of those in hot pursuit, for he knew that they were unprovided with firearms, and he felt that he could keep out of their reach.

But it was a long journey to the settlement, and he could hope to find no friends nearer. He was almost unarmed; his pistols and ammunition were wet and useless, his rifle being abandoned before taking the leap, left only a knife in his possession as a weapon of offense or defense.

Should he meet with fresh foes, his fate was almost certain. He could offer but little resistance. Very likely a rifle-shot would end all; and the yells of the blood hounds in pursuit still rung out, as if in signaling to such Indians as might be within hearing.

"A bad show, but the only one," he muttered, between his clenched teeth. "I can't fight them—so, legs, do your duty!"

Several miles of the rough ground had been traversed, and still, despite his most strenuous efforts, Red Dan found that he could not shake off his pursuers, nor yet distance them enough to allow him to put into execution a ruse that had more than once stood him in good stead. Twice he slackened his pace, in order to do so, but as often the shrill yells or the rapid trampling of feet warned him of his peril, and doggedly he sped onward.

Suddenly a fierce curse broke from his lips. From his left, though still at some distance ahead, there came back a whoop in answer to those ringing out from his rear. Cheers of exultation, mingled with others of directions, told Red Dan that his obstinate pursuers believed their prey was at length in their power.

Nerved to desperation, Red Dan veered sharply to the right, and then with every muscle strained to its utmost ten-

sion, he ran as he had never run before. He felt that the end must come soon, in one shape or another, for such a killing pace could not long be maintained.

The yelling still rung out behind him, and now he could distinguish fresh voices—those of a different tribe, but still he knew that they were those of enemies. As he dashed on, these voices grew gradually nearer, and he knew that the fresh warriors were gradually overhauling him.

Red Dan felt his strength failing him. His wild race for life had already been protracted over nearly half a dozen miles of tangled forest and broken ground, at a killing pace. His overtaxed frame was quivering in every fiber, and knowing that he must soon fall—that he could not hope to either dodge or tire down the foes last entering, the stubborn scout resolved to turn at bay and die weapon in hand, striking a blow for revenge. As he had lived, so would he die—a man, true to the last.

With this resolve he paused and drew his knife. His back was placed against the trunk of a huge tree. And thus, with eyes glaring and muscles nerved, he awaited the savage onset.

Not long was he kept in suspense. The foe was close at hand, and then the bushes parted as the foremost warrior bounded into the little glade.

A simultaneous cry broke from the lips of both, as their weapons were uplifted. The savage uttered a quick sentence, and sprung forward.

There was a clash of steel, a tiny shower of sparks, as the barbed and knife-blade met. This, and then a short, confused struggle.

A shrill whoop of victory, and the knife was dashed aside, the scout's right arm falling to his side, as though disabled.

Then the tomahawk glistened in the air, as it rose for the finishing stroke.

The weapon fell; a dull, heavy crash followed. With a gasping, guarding cry, Red Dan tottered and fell to the ground, the hot life-blood gushing forth from a frightful wound upon the head.

Then as the other Indians dashed into the glade, the vic-

torious warrior uttered his exultant scalp halloo, and brandished the gore-stained hatchet around his head.

It was Silouee, the Coosaw chief.

CHAPTER IV.

THE "CITY OF REFUGE."

THE sudden move of Red Dan, as stated, took the savages completely by surprise, it being the first intimation given of his suspecting treachery on their part, but as soon they quickly rallied. Chosen braves and petty chiefs, they were too well skilled in warfare to be long disconcerted.

Even then they did not lose sight of their other captive, and several made no move other than to assure themselves that he still remained. Their instructions from Caddo with their chief, had been very strict, and expressly commanded them to convey the two scouts to the village, and to keep them under close guard, though without using force, if possible.

Harry Howland had been watching for some such move upon Red Dan's part, but this occurred so suddenly that he was for a moment completely bewildered. Perhaps 'twas better thus, for the excitement of the chase now in progress through the water, in a measure enchain'd the attention of the red-skins remaining; an opportunity the young scout was not slow to improve.

He did not care to shed blood, when it could possibly be avoided, and well knew that the five braves remaining by him would quickly overpower his struggles did he attempt an escape by such means. Placing a just confidence in his endurance and fleetness of foot, he resolved to follow Red Dan's advice.

Only one of the savages—a large, brawny brave—stood between him and the course he had decided upon following; the other four had, almost unconsciously, drawn close to the river bank, and were eagerly gazing on upon the aquatic contest. Howland rapidly shifted the ride to his left hand.

The large savage was attracted by this motion, and turned quickly toward his charge. But he divined the truth too late to avert the catastrophe.

Howland sprang forward as his right hand shot out, alighting full upon the exposed neck of the swarthy Hercules, fairly lifting the re-skin from his feet, sending him lumbering backward to the ground, bleeding and senseless.

Without pausing, Harry dashed on, knowing that now the test was before him. If recaptured, he could expect but scanty treatment, and such as would insure his remaining a prisoner.

The blow and fall awakened the other savages to a knowledge of what was transpiring in their rear, and with angry yells they noted the flight of their second captive, bidding fair to escape them, also. Then as the bushes closed behind Howland, they dashed forward in swift pursuit.

The young scout had gained a short vantage, and felt confident of maintaining it, having before tested his powers of swiftness and endurance. But upon his track were those both trained and far more hardy, who, in their sleuth-hound perseverance, in time could worry down the nimble-footed deer.

After their first yell of angry surprise, the four Indians sped on in silence. Their whole spirit was in the chase, and they were no foolish hot-bloods to waste precious breath in fruitless yelling.

Gradually they separated, spreading out upon either hand, as though desirous of keeping their quarry in a direct course.

As yet they had only occasional glimpses of the fugitive through the trees and bushes, but his footsteps still saluted their hearing, showing that he was not gaining ground to any great extent.

Howland also dashed on in doleful silence. He did not even once glance backward; the course he was following was too marked to permit that with impunity, but his ear, which gave him a correct idea of the situation. He knew that he was not retreating; that for once his pride of speed of foot was equaled; if not surpassed.

A peculiar triumphant yell now came from his pursuers. Though not knowing what had called it forth, Howland could not repress a thrill of apprehension.

His vantage was still the same, or nearly so. His breath still came free and easily, for he was just warming up to the work. The coast in front seemed open and free from any unusual obstacle.

Then why that yell? What was it that occasioned such a triumphant peal?

He was soon to learn the cause. And then, too, was made plain the reason why his pursuers had sought to keep him in a direct course.

Howland was now in a portion of the country but imperfectly known to him, and his ignorance of its peculiar formation had led him into a trap from which there seemed no escape.

A cry of despair burst from his lips, as he abruptly perceived, while once again there came to his ears the exultant yell of his enemies, this time sounding still nearer and more clear.

Before him, almost at his feet, transversely with his course, ran a deep and wide gully or ravine, its bottom thickly studded with jagged boulders, its flinty sides covered with a scanty growth of shrubs and parasitic plants. Too wide to be leaped by mortal power, the descent and ascent could only be made with the greatest care, and even then with positive danger.

This was the barrier, this was the trap of the red skins, into which they had driven their human prey, and then, exultant, they burst into view.

The mind of the scout grasped the situation, and decided his course of action in an instant. He might surrender, and thus save his life for a time, at least; whether for long he had doubts, from the ardor displayed by his pursuers.

They would scarcely have taken so much trouble to secure their village a mere visitor, even though the chief had expressed a desire for his company. There could be but one solution: he had already been doomed to death, the execution of which was only delayed for some secret purpose.

This is why Howland did not think of timely surrendering. He believed that, once within the village, his fate was sealed, beyond a doubt. Better a sudden and comparatively painless death by the weapons of these heathens, while fighting for life, than that.

His blood was fairly roused by the chase. The odds were four to one ; and either one of the quartette, with equal weapons, would be a good match for him. But of that he did not think.

As the red-skins burst through the bushes, uttering their taunting yells of triumph, Howland dealt the first blow. His heavy rifle sprung up, and from out the flame-tinted puff there sped a messenger of death, crashing through the brain of the foremost Indian. And mingled with the report, was the defiant shout of the desperate Cavalier.

A horrible screech of death agony joined the chorus of significant sounds, and with a convulsive leap the stricken savage fell to the ground, his hands clutching spasmodically at the leaves and moist dirt. Thus died Wediah, the scarred **war-chief of the Creek nation.**

The three surviving savages did not appear to notice the death of their leader. They sprang forward upon their prey.

Howland dropped his rifle and sought to draw his pistols, but without success. Three pair of arms clutched him, twining round his body like living bands of steel, against the power of which he struggled in vain.

The curling smoke-wreath had not yet dissipated amidst the overhanging foliage, when the young scout was borne to the ground and his arms securely pinioned behind his back. Thus brief had been the transition from freedom to captivity.

Silently the savages arose, and then gathered around their fallen comrade. But a cursory glance was needed to tell them that he was dead: that ghastly hole in the broad chest told where the destroying missile had torn its way, piercing **the very heart.**

A low, quivering wail as of mournful grief rose upon the air, as the three braves stood above the dead man. And even while the deadly passions still raged fiercely in the Cavalier's breast, he could not repress a quiver of momentary fear.

In truth, never before in all his varied career, had he stood so near to death's portals as then, when the three Creeks glanced toward him. As with one motion their arms

were raised, and three gleaming weapons flashed their bared steel as they quivered above the heads of the captive.

Though expecting instant death, the cheek of the Cavalier did not pale, nor did the glowing eyes lose their brilliancy. But this anger was only momentary. Then the savages recalled the words of their chief.

After a brief consultation, carried on in whispers, the slain war chief was laid beside a log and covered with leaves. The village was not far distant, and others would be sent to bring in the corpse.

Then Howland was jerked to his feet, and forced forward at a rapid rate along the back trail. With the exception of his being bound, no indignity had been offered him: a fact that not a little surprised the young scout.

Suddenly the foremost Indian paused and bent his head in listening. To his keen hearing had come the sound of approaching footsteps.

But he evidently regarded them with no apprehension, for, rising erect, a tremendous trill babbled from his lips. Then the bushes parted, and the giant savage who had been stricken down by Howland, stood before them.

His face was swollen, and a malignant hatred filled every feature. His comrades seemed ill at ease, as his right hand clutched the tomahawk at his side.

Howland read the truth. He saw that this warrior was the superior, in rank at least, of the others, and that he had resolved upon taking revenge for the crushing blow that had so humiliated him, in his own estimation.

But the tragedy was not to occur then. One word averted it: a name—that of their great chief, Chahachah.

This seemed to recall the petty chief to his senses, and with a deep sigh of disgust, he averted his head. Though ready thirsting for revenge, he dared not disobey the strict orders of his master.

A few minutes more brought them to the river's edge, where the current ran far below and beyond them. But it was now silent and deserted by all else. Nothing could be seen or heard of those who had pursued Red Dan.

Howland felt renewed hope at this, for he believed that his comrade had escaped, and if so, then he might count upon

one true friend who would dare all in his service. Could he have witnessed the scene even then transpiring, miles away, in which Red Dan was a prominent actor, that hope would have died a violent death.

Howland was too closely guarded for him to attempt another flight, and so, with the best will he could summon, the captive was marched into the Creek village. His appearance created but little excitement, though the guards hurried him into a stout log structure, as though ill at ease, where, with arms still bound, he was left alone.

It was a long, dreary time before a change came; long when summed by the prisoner's mind though the day had scarcely died away, and the shades of night settled down upon the earth. Then the door opened, and a figure hastily entered. A low cry of astonishment broke from Howland's lips.

Though but a momentary glimpse, the keen eyes of the young scout had made a discovery. He knew that a friend stood before him. A friend, true and devoted; and yet it was an Indian.

"Ayoana!"

"Helping Hand!"

As these words were simultaneously uttered, the new comer sprung forward, and a pair of soft, rounded arms were closely entwined around the captive's neck. A cry of anger burst from his lips, as this action recalled his bonds, but then he bowed his head and pressed his lips to the moist, ripe ones uplifted by his visitor.

"I did not look for this, Ayoana," whispered Howland, as her head sunk upon his breast, with a caressing cadence in his tones. "How comes it that you are here, so far from the home of your people?"

"Coosaw town not v'ly far 'way," brokenly lisped the Indian girl. "Come in canoe—Silouee paddle. Ayoana come jes' fo' fun—no t'ink she see Helping Hand."

"Silouee?" and there was a change in Howland's voice
 "Who is he?"

"Coosaw chief—Ayoana he brudder," laughed the maiden, as though pleased by his evident suspicion.

"Your brother? I did not know that. Is he here in the village, now?"

"No. Um gone walk woods—to council, me t'ink. Don't know fo' sure, dough; don't tell squaw such t'ings."

"A council! then it is true—the Indians are preparing for war—I feared it!"

"Ayoana don't know—squaw don't know no'ting 'bout war,' and there was a change in her tones.

"But you *do* know. Ayoana, tell me—do your people intend making war upon the whites?"

The Indian girl drew back, with an injured air. She spoke in a reproachful tone.

"Ayoana red—all red. White skin bad—velly bad, all but Helping Hand. He good, much good. He save Ayoana, but from madder white-skin. Injun girl love you, but hate all madders. You stay here, you die, plenty sure, fo' kill Weakman. Me save *you*, but odders *mas'* die!"

An act of simple generosity, performed months before, now bade fair to richly reward the young Cavalier. Ayoana, the sister of Silouee, the Coosaw chief, had once visited the settlement, and while there, her beauty of form and face had attracted the attention of a wine-heated Cavalier, who seized upon her, rather rudely.

Howland interfered by promptly knocking the fellow down, and in the duel that, as a matter of course, followed, the would-be gallant received a serious wound. Ayoana had not forgotten this act, and the two met frequently after that, in the forest.

Though so confiding and trusting, Ayoana had no cause to fear Howland. The acknowledged love of Alice Bryant was a safeguard that kept the simple Indian maiden from all harm or wrong at his hands.

"What do you mean, Ayoana? How can you save my life?" eagerly asked Howland, with freshened hope. "This place is close guarded, and if, as you say, the heathens are resolved to slay me, in revenge for my killing that savage, they will be still more watchful."

"You listen—me tell. Pelatomah be watch out dere. He t'ink Ayoana plenty nice. Dot why he let me in. Me go out, talk soft, mek Pelatomah go 'way fo' while. Den w'ile gone, Helping Hand git out--run 'way off. Heap dark now. Injun can't see much."

"But I have no weapons—nothing to fight with, if they should see me. My people live a long ways from here; some of your people might see me when day comes, and then they would bring me back."

"Dat so, but mus' go t' d'ler way; no good go back dere. Woods full Injun. See you, dey see you—tek scalp plenty quick. No; mus' go to my town—nobody hurt you dere. You safe so long as 'lon't step ob'r ditch. It *Coosaw-hatchie*," impressively added Ayoana.

"The 'City of Refuge'!" echoed Howland, a light breaking upon his mind, as he comprehended the meaning of the Indian maiden.

He had more than once heard of this strange sanctuary, though the accounts were vague and unsatisfactory. He knew that a murderer, or any criminal, no matter what his crime, from any tribe, might take refuge there and remain unmolested so long as he kept within the sacred limits, indicated by a narrow ditch encircling the town. Though standing within arm's length of the minister appointed to execute the sentence, while within that boundary he was safe.

"Your town—is that the city of refuge?"

"Yeh—Coosaw hatchie. You dere, you safe. Wait till Ayoana come, den he git you gun, tom'-hawk, knife, all dem; den show you trail to you people."

"But how can I find this place? I was never here before now."

In a few brief words Ayoana gave the requisite directions, and then repeating her caution, severed Howland's bonds, leaving in his hands a stout-bladed knife. The guard was impatiently signaling to her, and fearing to delay longer, Ayoana whispered:

"Me see dat he don't fasten d' or. Peldemah big fool 'bout Injun girl."

Instantly released, Howland heard Ayoana draw the love-smitten brave away from the door, and knew that the time for his venture had come. Though hardly daring to hope for success, he did not hesitate. To fail would make his situation no easier than it was already.

Gently pushing a door which he found to be unlocked, and then gliding through the narrow aperture, he closed it

after him. As Ayoana had said, the night was dark, and crouching low down to the ground, Howland glided forward at a rapid pace, yet using all possible caution.

In a few minutes he had left the village behind him, and entered the forest. Then, with exultant heart, he pressed on through the woods.

When the first excitement wore off, the scout realized how weary he was, and about midnight he sank down to rest. Almost unconsciously he fell asleep, and did not awaken until the sun had climbed above the treetops.

With an angry exclamation at his foolishness, the scout arose and resumed his journey. Now, in broad daylight, he had no difficulty in shaping his course. The landmarks told him he had several miles yet to travel.

Over half that distance had been traversed without event worthy of note, as Howland was congratulating himself upon his easy success. But this exultation was premature.

He was crossing a small open tract, when from one side there came a shrill whoop, accompanied by several rifle-shots, mingled with hurrying arrows. A quick glance told him that naught remained for it but a race for life.

Some half a score Indians had sprung out from a cover, and were dashing toward him at full speed, yelling in mad triumph, as though confident of an easy prey. Evidently they had noticed the unarmed condition of the pale face.

Howland knew his course well, and now bent his every energy toward gaining the Refuge before being overtaken. Once within that magic boundary, he was safe.

But could he do this? Were not the Comanches also inimical to the pale faces, and would not the cries of his pursuers call them forth to cut off this last hope? Would they suffer him to enter, alive?

These thoughts troubled Howland, and though naturally brave, they caused a shudder of fear to agitate his frame. Life was very dear to him, since he had heard the sweet confession from the lips of fair Alice.

The race was of short duration. But little more than a mile had to be traversed, and while fleeing for dear life, a man's foot is mighty. And so Howland's worst fears were confirmed.

As if in answer to the yells of his pursuers, a long, loud shout went up from in front, and was echoed back by a triumphant yell from the Creek warriors. They slackened their pace and deployed upon either flank, as though expecting their anticipated prey to double at this new peril.

But this Howland did not do. He knew that he could not much longer maintain such a killing pace. Another mile, at most, would finish him.

Thus, as his last hope, he dashed on, the long knife given him by Ayouna firmly clutched in his hand, its blade covered by his sleeve. If worst come to worst, he would die dealing a blow for vengeance; better that than tamely submit to be carried back only to undergo a painful and degrading death.

Then he bounded out upon a level tract of open ground, smooth almost as a floor, of some two hundred yards in width, beyond which rose the Coosaw village. Before him stood a number of warriors, with weapons drawn and ready, for the yells of the Creek braves had told them game was afoot.

Another yell came from his pursuers, and at it those in front advanced, ready to intercept the fugitive. Drawing a long breath, Howland grasped his knife firmly, and increased his speed.

The line of warriors were ready for the shock, and, as if mechanically, they drew toward the point for which the pale face was tending. The keen eye of the young scout saw this and his ready wit helped him in the emergency.

Even as the gleaming weapons were upraised to strike him and a deadly collision seemed inevitable, he sprang, like an arrow from the bow, to the left, thus clearing the main force. A yell of fury greeted this unexpected move, and was echoed back by the Creeks, who were now just entering the clearing.

But the brave upon the extreme right of the Coosaw line, sprung forward, and grappled with the desperate scout. Howland's furious resistance prevented them at first from using their weapons, but both lost their balance, and fell heavily to the ground.

With triumphant cries, the other savages sprung toward the spot where a confused struggle was going on. But ere they

took a second step, the combat, if such it might be termed, was over.

There was a bright flashing of steel in the clear sunlight, a shrill scream of mortal agony, and then one figure sprang erect. Upon the ground, writhing in the grasp of death, lay the Coosaw brave, the hot life-blood gushing forth from his cloven head.

With a faint cry of triumph, Howland staggered rather than sprang forward, the blood dripping freely from his head, and then, even while a score of savage weapons quivered in the air, uplifted to end his race, he sprang over the narrow ditch, and sunk lifeless upon the sacred ground!

Then, as the infuriated Creeks rushed to claim their victim, the Coosaw warriors raised the cry:

“COOSAW-HATCHIE! COOSAW-HATCHIE!”

With ready weapons they stood prepared to defend the sacred sanctuary from outrage!

CHAPTER V.

THE COOSAW'S BRAVERY.

A TRIM, saucy-looking brigantine, riding at anchor in a small bay, extending some distance into the mainland, scarcely more than a league from the settlement so frequently alluded to. Its boats had already landed a number of men, all thoroughly armed and equipped, as if for some inland expedition, and at an order from the commander, had returned to the vessel.

In that leader, one might easily recognize both the self-styled “Merit-no evil Meekface,” and the Spanish envoy, Steed Bonnett, now in his true colors as a pirate chieftain. These were his men — yonder vessel his cherished *Albatross*.

“Look ye here, my bally boys,” cried Bonnett, while a waive of his hand commanded attention. “We may as well see the course clear before us and then there will be no de-

day, after once making sail. I told you there was fun afoot, as well as abundance of plunder. So there is, though we may have to fight for it. Do you call that a drawback, or not?"

"No—no!" came the prompt reply, as though from the lips of one man.

Steed Bonnett smiled grimly, and a gratified light filled his dark eyes.

"Good! Though I expected as much. Well then, we are bound for the settlement by the river, and I look to you to avenge the death of the poor devils killed there the other night. Remember, they are all enemies; the more you kill now, the less there will be to trouble us in the future. It will be our first blow for our good king—and for ourselves, too," with a harsh laugh.

"The red heathens have promised to lend us a hand, and there'll be but little fighting. When it is over, help yourselves to whatever strikes your fancy; the negroes are already promised me. But now fall in, and we'll soon taste the fun."

The party, numbering some forty-odd seamen, armed with fusils, pistols and cutlasses, entered the forest, and guided by Steed Bonnett, proceeded at a round pace toward the little colony, that as yet had no suspicions of the peril threatening its welfare. Taken by surprise, the pirate party alone seemed sufficiently numerous and strong to sack the place, without aid from the Indian allies of whom Bonnett had spoken.

At this point was the first blow to be dealt, though the mad passion entertained by the pirate chieftain for Alice Bryant, had pressed matters much more rapidly than was good for the cause he had espoused. The different tribes had not yet become as one, and were far from being properly organized.

An hour's rapid marching carried the party to where they expected to meet with their red allies, but there were no signs of their presence, nor had the rendezvous been kept, as the keen-sighted Bonnett soon gleaned from the undisturbed ground. The moist earth would have received and retained a foot-pressure; but none such met his eager gaze.

The pirate chief's anger was frightful. In his disappoint-

ment, he cursed and blasphemed until more than one of his hardened followers stared aghast at the tirade.

"What is wrong, captain?" respectfully asked one, the scarred and grizzled boatswain.

"Matter? You ask that? See! the red devil's promised to meet me here—but where are they? Not here—nor have they been here! And what can we do alone? Nothing! The settlers would laugh us to scorn, from their stout block-house. May the devil burn the chief, for a foul-mouthed liar!"

"How many do they muster—able-bodied, I mean?" quietly asked the boatswain, and there was something in his tones that calmed the light of Steed Bennett's anger.

"Sixty—perhaps more, perhaps a few less. Too many for us, where they have the advantage of a bullet-proof breast-work," moodily replied the chieftain.

"But they don't stay inside there all the time, do they? Can't we keep them outside?"

"Ha! speak your meaning plainer, Mulkey; what queer coil is gathering in thy brain-pan now?"

"Just this, captain," added the old man, in a confident tone. "We must surprise the lubbers. But first, how far is it to this strong house, from the nearest cover?"

"Some sixty or seventy fathoms—not more."

"Good! I can do it!"

"What?"

"Captain, give me ten good men—my pick—and I'll engage that none o' the enemy 'll ever get inside that building, without my will. We'll rush there first, and hold it while you manage the others. You can do it. Each all-around is good for ten of the land-lubbers, I'll engage. How is it, messmates—say I right?"

"Yes—yes! lead on—we'll do our part, never fear!"

Mulkey quickly selected his men, and then gave them their instructions. With renewed confidence, Steed Bennett hastened on to the assault.

Mulkey, with his picked men, separated from the main force, as an attack from both sides, simultaneously, would be more apt to confuse the settlers, and only for one mischance, their plans would doubtless have succeeded throughout.

One of the colonists chanced to be at the edge of the woods, and catching sight of the armed force, he knew that danger threatened him and his. Instantly discharging his fusil, he turned and rushed back toward the village, shouting out the alarm at the top of his voice.

With a furious curse, Sued Bennett threw up his long fusil and sent a bullet tearing its way to the unfortunate man's vitals. But his work was already done.

The settlers, long used to sudden and treacherous attack by the red-skins, quickly divined the nature of the peril threatening them, and with one accord sprung to secure their fire-arms. In this movement they displayed more celerity and less confusion than the pirate chieftain had calculated upon.

"Forward, my belly boys!" he shouted, his tall form far in advance. "Strike home, and do not spare the cold steel. No quarter—down with the heretics!"

Melkey, though surprised by the sudden and totally unexpected alarm, was but slightly disconcerted. His object was before him, and to attaining that, his every energy was directed, and nothing short of death could turn him from it.

Through the dire confusion that filled the settlement, where women and children ran hither and yon, shrieking and wailing in sore affright, some of the men, more cool and collected, or clearer sighted than their fellows, saw this movement of the boatswain's party, and read its purpose aright. They saw, too, that were the block-house once carried, all was lost.

The cry of danger went up, and then one after another forsook all else and rushed to defend their stronghold. At almost the same instant the two parties gained the outer gate, and then ensued a desperate and sanguinary conflict.

Knives and the clash of steel blades grating venomously together, mingled with the hoarse shouts, the piercing cries, or the dying groan. Though several had fallen upon either side, at the first clash, the contesting numbers were nearly equal, and the strife raged with deadly ferocity.

Sued Bennett cared mainly for one object: that once secured, the rest mattered but little to him. He had set his mind upon capturing Alice Bryant, the innkeeper's daughter.

Calling half a dozen of his most trusted men about him, he

bade the others work their will, and then dashed forward in a course that would cut off communication between the inn and the block-house. Unless Alice had already sought refuge there—an unlikely supposition—he felt confident of success, as the settlers were distracted greatly by the terror-stricken cries of their loved ones, who clung to them, pleading for the help that, often, they were powerless to give.

Thomas Bryant had rushed to the door, at the first alarm, but for a moment was bewildered, and knew not what to do. Then as Alice gained his side, he saw that the path leading to the block-house was filled with yelling, exultant foremen.

“Back, Alice—back to your own room!” he cried, desperately. “We must fight the devils here. Go, and pray to God for protection.”

The heavy oaken door was swinging to and then stoutly barred. Not a moment too soon, either, for while still quivering, the pirate chief rushed heavily against it. A bitter curse burst from his lips, as he staggered back, bruised and shaken.

“To the windows—burst in, my laddies!” he screamed, mad with rage, and setting the example himself. “Ten guineas to the one who kills that devil!”

With a wild roar the pirates dashed in the sash, and essayed to enter the room, but they were not to triumph so tamely. As a loud report rang out, one of their number staggered back, with a horrible oath, falling dead in his tracks.

Transformed to a very demon at this sight, Second Bennett sprang bodily into the room, narrowly escaping the second shot of Bryant, the bullet knocking aside the gayly plumed hat, and then maiming a second pirate. But it was the brave man’s last effort.

“Down—curse ye, take that!” howled Bennett, as his heavy saber fell with crashing force full upon the head of the brave innkeeper.

Without a groan Bryant sank to the floor, his life-blood mingling with the white sand. And over his prostrate figure rushed the maddened pirates; the leader in search of Alice, the men attracted by the goodly array of liquors that stocked the bar.

With a yell of triumph, Bennett darted up the broad flight

of stairs, and then there came a terrified shriek, mingled with the sound of his voice in diabolical laughter.

Meanwhile those without had not been idle, but for a time the pirates had matters pretty much their own way. It seemed as though the settlement was doomed to annihilation, so completely had its inhabitants been taken by surprise.

But then as they beheld their loved ones, even their wives and children, falling unresistingly beneath the weapons of their ruthless assailants, each man seemed transformed into a hero, supernaturally endowed, and fought with desperate valor. And the greed for plunder, on the part of the pirates, also worked into the hands of their adversaries.

Intent upon self-interest, the pirates separated, and each only sought to make his share as great as possible, forgetting, for the moment, that in numbers they were fairly matched by the colonists. And by this time, too, the latter had found time in which to gather up their weapons.

Mulkey and his men fought bravely, but at the warning cry of his adversaries, other colonists rushed to the spot, and the tide now turned. One by one the pirates fell, fighting to the last, with dauntless bravery, until only two of the eleven escaped with their lives; the boatswain being sorely wounded.

Then the settlers combined and in turn assumed the offensive, while their helpless ones sought safety in the friendly block-house. In turn surprised, the pirates were forced to abandon their plunder in order to protect their lives.

Though fighting desperately, they were being forced slowly back toward the forest. Thus matters stood when their chieftain reappeared.

In his arms he bore the form of a woman, whose pale and deathlike features were those of Alice Bryant. A general shout went up from the colonists, both Puritan and Cavalier, at this sight, and as one man they rushed on to the rescue.

The foremost was a young man, but little better than a boy, though his blood-dripping sword told that at least one foe had tasted his metal. This was young Eugene Harcourt, and in Steed Bennett he had already recognized the murderer of his brother Charles.

"Ha! murderer!" he screamed, wildly. "We meet again—but you shall not escape my vengeance this time!"

"Pah! suckling, art thou in haste to join thy hot-headed brother?" sneeringly cried Bonnett, as with his steel-like arm he brushed aside the vicious thrust aimed at his heart; and then with a motion quick as light, his long blade passed sheer through Harcourt's body.

"Close up, my bullies," cried the pirate, as he cast the dying boy from him. "We must scud for this time, but if the ill-mannered whelps press you too closely, give them a taste like that."

Their retreat was admirably guarded, and though fighting at every step, could neither beat down nor penetrate that glittering wall of steel, and it seemed as though the flower of the settlement was fated to be carried off before their very eyes, despite their utmost endeavors to prevent such a calamity. So Steed Bonnett believed, and his scornful laugh rung out loud and clear in its taunting evidence.

But another enemy appeared from a quarter and in a guise that the pirates least anticipated. What two-score men failed to accomplish, one hand wrought!

A fierce yell broke upon the confused air, and as all instinctively paused, startled by the sound, a single form bounded into the very midst of the pirate crowd, coming from their rear. A gleaming weapon flashed through the air, and then with a gurgling groan, Steed Bonnett sunk to the ground, from a tomahawk stroke.

The same hands that had dealt the blow, seized the falling form of the maiden, and then as the enraged pirates pressed madly around him, the blood-stained hatchet rose and fell, sweeping here and there, seeming an impassable wall of steel, dealing death or ghastly wounds upon every side, or else warding off the blows leveled at its wielder's head or person.

Recognizing an ally in this bold stranger, the colonists rushed forward with exultant cries. For a moment there was a frightful *melee*, confused and seemingly inextricable.

But then the pirates gave ground. In their midst they bore the ghastly form of their fallen chief.

Thus the stranger was left free from their coils. For a moment he stood erect, and pealed forth his war-cry. But

then he reeled, swayed to and fro, while the senseless maiden dropped from his nerveless arms. With a feeble whoop of triumph he sunk to the ground, seemingly a corpse.

Around the two forms crowded the settlers, for the moment forgetting their enemy, who improved the opportunity by retreating rapidly. And when the momentary confusion was over, the colonists realized that farther pursuit would be ill advised, as they had no means of knowing whether or no the pirates might not have reinforcements at hand.

Their dead and wounded were carried back to the village, and while some attended to the wants of the sufferers, others guarded against another surprise.

As Alice was brought into the inn, her father was just recovering from his insensibility, for the sword of the pirate had glanced from a direct cut, thus inflicting a severe wound, instead of cleaving the innkeeper's skull.

The maiden quickly roused from her swoon, and was found to be unharmed, the strong arms of Steed Bonnett having effectually shielded her, even amidst the storm of clashing steel that marked the retreat. When told of her almost miraculous rescue, Alice at once sought the presence of the brave man.

To her surprise she beheld an Indian, and soon recognized him for Silouee, the Coosaw chief, who had more than once attracted her attention by his admiring gaze, while in the village. Now he lay there like one dead, and she realized how deep must be his devotion, to thus dare almost certain death in her service.

During the brief though furious struggle, the Coosaw had received numerous wounds, though but one of them seemed dangerous, beyond profusely bleeding. But, added to this great depletion, the time seemed close at hand when the Indian's feet must take up the long and dark trail leading to the happy hunting-grounds of his people.

But after an hour of insensibility, Silouee opened his eyes, and as he beheld the pale face of the maiden bending over him, a sigh of gratitude heaved his bosom. Then he sunk back, in a deathlike repose.

But the brave Coosaw was not yet to die. His temperate habits and superb constitution, drove back the dark angel, and

on the second day after the attack, he was able to leave his couch.

Through this he had been carefully nursed by the grateful maiden, though it was not without a feeling of half-alarm that Alice noticed the ardent, almost fierce glow of admiration that filled the Indian's dark eyes whenever gazing upon her. She felt a secret misgiving that evil would yet come of this, but she could not neglect or slight the preserver of her liberty, if not from something infinitely worse.

There was one other thought that troubled her not a little. It was now the seventh day since Harry Howland and Red Dan had left the settlement for a two days' scout.

During that length of time, nothing had been heard of or from them. Alice feared that ill had befallen her lover, and her heart was very sad.

On this day—the second one succeeding the pirates' attack—Alice left the inn and strolled down along the beach, her thoughts far away, dwelling upon her lover's possible fate. A thousand dread pictures filled her mind, until her bright eyes were dimmed with tears.

A light footfall beside her roused Alice from this despondent reverie, and turning, she beheld Silouee. A faint smile greeted the savage, as he gravely bowed.

"The Singing Bird is sad," uttered the Coosaw, in a deep but mellow voice. "Her heart is heavy when she thinks of her people killed by the bad braves of Evil Eye."

"Yes, I was thinking of them—and of other things," hesitated Alice. "But you bear your weapons—surely you are not going to leave us so soon, chief?" she added, in surprise.

"Yes; Silouee is going back to his people."

"But why so soon? You are not yet strong enough to make the journey. You will fall ill on the trail!"

"Would Singing Bird care much if it was so? Is there room in her heart to think of the Coosaw?" pointedly uttered Silouee.

"Yes. I shall ever remember you with gratitude, chief, for did you not save my life?"

"Singing Bird," slowly uttered Silouee, taking one of Alice's hands in his large brown palms, and stroking it tenderly, at-

most reverentially. "I came down here to speak plain words in your ear. I am Silouee, a chief of the Coesaws. My fathers were chieftains, before me. They could not lie. They never taught me to speak with a crooked tongue. My words can travel only one trail—that of truth. Listen.

"You are a pale-face. You are very beautiful. But better than that, your heart is true and kind. It makes your eyes look down beneath the outside skin. You do not scorn the poor Indian, because his is a different color from yours.

"Singing Bird, listen well, and do not forget my words. A black cloud is coming. It will soon be here. All will be dark beneath it. Blood will run thick, and scalps will grow on every bush and tree; but it will be white blood and white scalps. It has been spoken at the great council, and the war-latchet has been dug up and painted red.

"The tall brave, Evil Eye, who held you when Silouee came up, is one of the chiefs. He has sworn that you should be his squaw, and the red chiefs said it should be so. All said that but Silouee. He said *no!* That he would take the scalp of the soft-tongued pale-face before the Singing Bird should come to harm, and so he will. But now he can not watch over the Singing Bird all the time, and while he is away, the bad men may come. It would be different if Singing Bird was Silouee's squaw. Then she would be safe."

Alice stared in amazement. She had never dreamed of the matter going thus far. But the Coesaw stood beside her, patiently in sober earnest, awaiting her answer to his abrupt proposal.

"Your—I your squaw?" Alice stammered, scarce knowing what she said.

"Yes. We are of different people, but both have hearts. We can both feel the same pleasures or the same pain, though my skin is red, while yours is white, like the falling cotton. Silouee is a chief, and it is not good that his lodge should remain empty. He asks Singing Bird to come there, as his wife."

"No, chief, that can never be. If you are in earnest, I am sorry—very sorry for you; but you must think no more of this. I like you, as a true friend, and shall always be grateful; but love—no, no! Think no more of that, for it can

never—*never* be,” firmly replied Alice, yet half-alarmed by the earnestness of her dusky suitor.

“Singing Bird has thought—she does not speak with her eyes shut?”

“I have thought—it can never be. It would be wrong—a sin—”

“It is well,” interrupted the Coosaw. “Silouee talked through a cloud, but the truth of Singing Bird has driven it away. He was a fool to lift his eyes so high—and he only a poor Indian!”

“Silouee—chief!” eagerly cried Alice, her hand arresting the Indian, as he turned away. “Do not go in anger. Let us be good friends, as heretofore. Believe me, my heart is sorry that—”

“See! Silouee has forgotten. The cloud is yonder. Singing Bird will not call it up again,” almost sternly interrupted the savage.

“But you are not angry—we part as friends, chief?” added Alice, anxiously.

“Silouee is no dog. He has eaten salt with the Singing Bird. She is his friend. But remember the cloud, and beware of Evil Eye!” uttered the Coosaw, as turning, he strode rapidly away.

Alice gazed after him until his tall form disappeared amidst the shadows of the forest. Then she wandered on, her thoughts once more dwelling upon her lover, and his unaccountable absence, so long beyond the limit prescribed.

CHAPTER VI.

THE OUTCAST CHIEF.

This menacing state of affairs did not last long. The baffled Creeks lowered their weapons and fell back.

The inmates of the Coosaw village were now all afoot; and they saw that any attempt to violate the sanctuary would be met by a swift retribution. Though within reach of their

extended arms, their escaped captive was as far from their power as though he had taken refuge in the sun above.

Still, there was no helping hand raised to assist the scout. He might lie there and bleed to death, if must be; not a Coosaw would touch him, either with good or evil intent.

But Howland had only been slightly hurt, during the brief struggle. The Coosaw had only succeeded in inflicting a slight scalp wound, before he died. Howland had fallen more from exhaustion than aught else.

This faintness was of short duration, but while lying there, Howland had seen enough to feel assured of his safety, so long as he remained within the sanctuary. Arising, he glanced around him.

The Coosaw brave whom he had stricken down, was dead. Several warriors were carrying the corpse toward the village.

The scout now realized that he would have to guard against deadly enemies within, as without. His heart sunk heavily as he read aught the dogged looks of stern resolve that rested upon the faces of both Coosaw and Creek.

He knew that he was doomed to death. He knew that keen eyes would be upon him night and day, awake or sleeping, watching an opportunity to avenge their comrade's death, without violating the sanctuary.

And how would it all end? He was already suffering the pangs of both hunger and thirst. Would he be able to procure any of either here? Scarcely.

He would be closely watched until driven by necessity across the magic boundary. Then? The fate of the murderer would be his.

Howland's only hope now rested upon Ayoana and her brother. Should they return in time, he hoped that all might be well, for he believed that Silence would consider the preservation of his sister more than an offset to the brave's death, especially as that was wrought in fair fight, with equal weapons.

Thus the day and succeeding night passed by, wearily enough. Howland wandered at will through the village, followed at every step by several warriors, with weapons bared. Water he procured at the spring that bubbled forth inside the limits, but of food he was deprived. Wherever he went, the

provision seemed to vanish like magic, or else was jealously guarded by its owners, and he dared not attempt taking it by force.

He knew that this was just what was desired. A crime committed *without* the sanctuary, left the actor refuge; within it was different. These points had been given him by Ayoana.

An hour before noon of the second day, Silence and his sister returned. Howland, despite his own troubles, could not help wondering at their cold reception by the Coosaws.

Not a cry of welcome went up from the braves, while several of them strode hastily aside, as if desirous of avoiding a meeting with their chief. With moody brow, Silence strode on to his lodge, but Ayoana glided up to Howland, and though more reserved, her eyes and features spoke as cordially as when they last parted.

In answer to her queries, Howland briefly detailed what had occurred, and Ayoana was evidently not a little perturbed. The situation became more complicated than ever, and the trail before them seemed very tangled and dangerous.

Together they entered the lodge where sat Silence, busily smoking his pipe. A few rapid words from Ayoana, and the chief arose, cordially grasping the scout's hand.

"Helping Hand was good to Ayoana, and the heart of Silence is very grateful. What can he do for his white brother?"

"Give me an hour's start outside this sanctuary, and I ask no more. I killed one of your braves, but it was in fair fight. He tried to kill me, first. See! here is where his knife struck," uttered Howland, pointing to the still sore cut.

"If Silence could do this, he would, gladly. But all is black, now. Silence is still a chief, but he sits with a cloud over his head. Opitchi-Manneyto had arrows for the feet of Silence, and now he hurls when he sees a cloud hanging in the toils. It is bad—bad!" gravely muttered the Coosaw.

Howland stood perplexed. He could not understand the chief's meaning. Silence, glancing at the scout, and nodding bright the gleaming sash that draped over the form of the white man.

"Helping Hand does Silonce wrong in his thoughts. Ayoana is more to his heart than a foolish brave whose arm was not strong enough to slay a warrior. He will help his brother, if he can."

"If he can! Is not Silonce a chief? Are not these your people? And is not a chief's word law to his followers?" rather hastily demanded the pale-face.

"Listen. Silonce will speak plain, though they be bitter words. Once he was a great chief—all who call themselves Coosaws were his people. If Silonce said go there—die, he was obeyed. No one dared to ask why he said such words. Then he was a chief, in more than name. But now—Opitchi-Munneyto has won—Silonce has lost his people."

"Helping Hand has seen'd war, in the woods? He is a good scout—yes. It is true. The pale-faces from the land of sweet flowers are very angry. They came to the Coosaws, the Creeks, the Cherokees, to all the red-men; they came and said—'Help us fight these other pale-faces, and we will make you very rich, besides giving back to you the lands that belonged to your fathers.' This is what they said."

"But one—the tall chief, Evil Eye—said more. He said he must have the yellow-haired singing bird by the dark river, for his spear. The chiefs all said well; all but Silonce. He said no! That was the first snare of Opitchi-Munneyto."

"Then one day while walking the woods, Silonce saw a friend with a white skin, chased by the Creeks, who wished to take his scalp. The white hunter once saved Silonce's life. The Coosaw then swore that he was a brother; that when the time came, he would give back the life. A chief can not lie, and Silonce kept his pledge. He strack down Fire Scalp—"

Helping Hand started back and uttered a cry. He knew now that the Coosaw was speaking of Red Din, and he listened with a beating heart. Silonce raised his hand to check the questions that trembled on the young scout's tongue.

"Wait: Helping Hand shall know all. Silonce did strike down his brother, but it was to save his life. Fire Scalp had run far and was tired. The Creek braves would soon have caught him. But when they came up, Silonce claimed his scalp. They were angry, but dared not dispute the will of a

chief. When they had gone back, Silouee carried Fire Scalp to a hole in the ground, and bound up his wounds.

"Silouee was called before the great council and asked for the scalp of his brother. He told them that he had sent Fire Scalp back to his own people. The chiefs were very angry and talked hot words, but Silouee did not care. Then they said that the Coosaws must choose another chief, or else the nation should be swept from the face of the earth. Silouee laughed at them, because he believed his people loved him. But Opitchi-Manneyto had been at work there, too. He had whispered bad thoughts in the ears of the Coosaws, and they ask for another chief. Silouee has no people, now!"

The last words were spoken in a mournful tone, that told how deeply the chief felt his disgrace, despite his stoicism. Ayona crept to his side and wound her arms around his neck. Howland turned aside, deeply affected by the scene.

But Silouee quickly banished this feeling of gloom, and then the three consulted upon the course they had best pursue. More than ever did Howland realize his great peril, and those upon whose aid he had so confidently counted were well-nigh as helpless as himself.

It was finally decided that the scout should still remain a sort of prisoner at large, with Ayona to furnish him with food, and to watch for a chance of escaping. In time this watching must relax as the attention of the tribe would naturally be turned toward the fast-gathering war.

Howland, though knowing that Silouee was going to the settlement, refrained from sending any message to Allen, for he, with a lover's intuition, saw that the chief was heartily smitten in that quarter, and he feared losing through jealousy, his last ally. The tone of the Coosaw when describing his resistance to Steel Bonnet's demand could not be mistaken.

The days dragged slowly and wearily by, after the cast chief's departure, but the wished-for opportunity did not come. Wherever Howland went, at least one dastard skulker skulked close to his heels. Only while within the lodge was he freed from their vicious glances, and even then he knew that every side of the structure was closely watched.

Silouee's statement of his deposition was speedily confirmed by the nation of the Coosaws. A delegation from their allies

visited the City of Refuge, and in council a new chief was chosen; Chinnabar, a bitter enemy to Silouee, who was pronounced an outcast and a traitor. Orders were given that every red-man of the confederacy should regard him as such, and slay him on sight.

Ayoana kept close watch for her brother, after this, and succeeded in warning him of his peril on his return from the settlement, before his presence was suspected by his one-time followers. This blow deeply enraged him, as well it might.

That night it was resolved that Howland should effect his escape. The delegation had not yet left the village, and in the interest thus created, the guard upon the pale-face would naturally be less strict.

From Silouee's lodge Ayoana secured the necessary weapons, and succeeded in conveying them beyond the village, unseen. Howland retained the knife that had already done him such signal service.

At dark, there was only one brave watching the refugee. Howland sauntered idly through the village, hoping to throw off this shadow.

For a time he was unsuccessful, but then he lost sight of the savage, and with rapidly-beating heart, hastened toward the point where he was to meet with the outcast chief. Thus he fell into the trap set for him by the cunning guard.

As he passed beyond the charmed ditch, Howland heard an exultant yell, and quickly turning he beheld a Coosaw brave rushing upon him, with uplifted hatchet. He could not regain the sanctuary, and desperately drew his knife, knowing that the struggle must be only momentary, else the Indians, whose alarmed yells now filled the village, would be upon him in a body.

The rush of the Coosaw was so impetuous that neither of the fighting weapons inflicted a wound, and when the two combatants fell heavily to the ground, Howland beneath. The Indian, with a triumphant yell, partially arose, one hand clutching the white man's throat, the other brandishing a tomahawk.

It seemed as though the young scout's time had come. From beyond came yells that told the entire village was aroused, and he could hear the heavy rush of many feet approaching the spot.

Howland closed his eyes and awaited the death-blow. A heavy sickening thud smote upon his ears, and then the crushing pressure was removed from his chest. He sprang erect, confused and bewildered.

"Quick!" muttered a voice close beside him, and Howland recognized the tones of Silence, the outcast. "Cossaw's blood has stained the ground, and the avenger will follow hot upon our trail. Let Helping Hand run now; it is for his scalp!"

Howland needed no second warning, but grasped the weapons handed him by Silence, and then the two dashed away from the spot of death at full speed, yet using care to avoid unnecessary noise. He submitted to the guidance of the outcast chief, unquestioningly, for in slaying the Cossaw, Silence had given incontestable proof of his fidelity to the preserver of his sister.

For fully an hour the fugitives pressed on at unusual speed, though the yells of their pursuers had long since died away, but Silence knew that they would follow on, if only by the slow method of torchlight trailing.

When slackening up for breath, the Cossaw told Howland his plans. They would at once make for the den where Red Dan was in hiding, and then together strike out for the settlement. He also signified his intention of joining the pale faces for good, since his own people had outlawed him.

Twice during that night the two refugees were forced to make a wide detour, to avoid the camp of redskins, thus losing much valuable time. Hence it was that the sun had some time risen before they neared the den where Red Dan had taken refuge, to await the rescue of his brother scout, that Silence had promised to accomplish.

The outcast gave the agreed-upon signal, but no answer came. Again and again the call was repeated, but ever with the same result. A look of anxiety rested upon the swart countenance of the chief.

Motioning Howland to remain still, he glided forward and entered the den. It was unoccupied, but from its appearance he knew that Red Dan had only left it temporarily; that he would soon return.

At Silence's call, Howland joined him. Then they awaited Red Dan's return with such patience as they could summon.

A brief description of the place the refugees occupied, becomes necessary. It was situated in a short range of hills, rocky and broken. Half-way up the side looking toward the south-east, was a narrow, bench-like formation, some few yards in width. From the back of this, the hill ran up as before, ending on the farther side in an almost perpendicular precipice.

Level with this "bench," in the higher hill, was a small cave-like den, that had probably often furnished shelter for bears and other wild beasts. It was barely twenty feet square, and half that in height, with angular sides and rocky floor. The entrance was small, and beside it was a huge bowlder, with which the passage could be entirely closed, though plenty of space was left to admit air, or the inmates taking observations without.

Such was the place in which Howland found himself, weary and faint.

For half an hour the two refugees sat in silence, smoking and thinking. Though impatient for Red Dan's return, so they could start for the settlement, they really needed rest after their long and arduous tramp.

Suddenly Silence dropped his pipe and bent his head. A deep frown settled down over his face. Howland gazed wonderingly at him.

"Fire Scalp is in trouble," muttered the outcast, still listening intently. "See! they are fighting—he is running this way, and the red-men are up on his trail!"

"How do you know? I can hear nothing," dubiously uttered Howland.

"Silence knows—his ears do not lie. Let Helping Hand get ready to burn powder. They will track Fire Scalp here, and we must help him."

In a few minutes the truth of the outcast chief's words became apparent. Red Dan appeared in view, and dashed bravely up the hillside, too bravely pursued to attempt the slightest concealment. Behind him, scarce a hundred yards away, came a full score of Indians, whom Silence recognized for his own people; or rather those who had once called him their chief, and those who had so deeply disgraced him.

As Red Dan burst into the cave, a cry of despair broke

from his lips, but then changed to one of joy, as he recognized his friends. But there was no time for a greeting then.

The red-skins were close at hand, and scarcely had the heavy boulder been rolled into place, when their planned attack appeared above the level of the shelf. For a moment they seemed bewildered by the sudden disappearance of their prey, but then the deeply-imprinted trail guided their eyes, and they noticed the blocked entrance.

The Coosaw war-cry rang out, as they sprung forward to the attack, no doubt believing they had only one foe to deal with. But then from round the jagged boulder three puffs of smoke shot forth, and a horrible chorus of death-yells went up, as the Indians slunk back, those of their number lying in convulsive throes upon the ground.

Then from the cave there issued a significant sound. In other days it had been one that ever carried pleasure and exultation to their hearts; but now that was changed.

It was the thrilling war-whoop of their disgraced chief, Silouee, the outcast!

CHAPTER VII.

THE PIRATE'S TRIUMPH.

As may naturally be supposed, the feeling against the pirates was very strong, with the colonists, after this deadly and well-nigh fatal attack. Though Steel Breeze and Red and Worley had long been names of suspicion among the coast, this was the first time the latter had ever been disturbed by either.

There was a lesson, close guard was constantly kept, and sentries were posted at the point on every side, but the pirates could still choose to remain in the cove. In the meantime three days passed by without any thing beyond the usual routine of events.

It was mid-forenoon of the fourth day, when one of the scouts was observed hastening to the village, with the air of

one bearing important tidings. Though this occasioned considerable excitement, yet there was no confusion.

As the scout gained the inn door, a crowd gathered around him, each one propounding some question. From his hasty and somewhat incoherent answers, it was found that no immediate danger could be apprehended.

He had been scouting around, and meeting with a fresh trail, that he knew had been made by white men, he traced it up. Hearing the low sound of voices, he crept nearer, until he could distinguish the words, as well as gain a good view of the speakers.

There were only five in number, one of them being none other than Steel Bennett himself, whose bandaged head evidenced he was still suffering from the blow dealt him by Samnee, the Coosaw. As may be supposed, the scout listened intently, and mentally registered every word uttered by the party.

The pirates—so he learned from their conversation—had come to that point to keep an appointment with Chohacallah, the Creek chief, for the purpose of arranging a time when they might attack the village, with their united forces. The meeting was to take place at noon: the pirate chieftain having preferred waiting, to making the trip from his vessel through the heat.

As the scout concluded, a quick glance ran around the crowd. The same idea struck them one and all. It was a chance that might never again recur: then should they suffer the opportunity to pass them? Steel Bennett would prove an invaluable hostage.

"Neighbor," cried Bryant, pressing forward, "you all hear this? Our worst enemy is in our power. Not content with what he has already upon his neck, he is busy planning how to murder. Shall we let him carry out his foul plot? No! Let us seize upon the demon, and make out unto him the reward he so richly merits. Who will volunteer to follow me?"

As one man, the entire party volunteered, but Bryant quickly made his choice. There were only five of the enemy, and the spot designated was scarcely more than a league from the village. As their object was to capture, not kill,

the pirates, Bryant took ten men: stout, trusty fellows, upon whom he could depend.

Under guidance of the scout, Wyckes, the little party set forth upon their mission, in high spirits, for they felt confident that their hated enemy was within their power, and already he had been doomed to pay the penalty of his manifold crimes. No thoughts of mercy filled their hearts, as they thought of the near and dear ones who had been so ruthlessly murdered by that fiend's commands.

In an hour their guide told them the spot was close at hand, and then they paused, while he advanced to learn whether the pirates were still in the same location. In impatient suspense the colonists awaited the result, trembling with eagerness to accomplish their object.

The collision came speedily, but with a vastly different result from that so fondly anticipated. There was a surprise, complete and deadly, but the colonists were the ones taken unawares, instead of the pirates.

From their right there rang out a clear, commanding voice, uttering a terribly significant word: "FIRE!"

A thunderous crash followed, and it seemed as though the little band of settlers was totally annihilated by the deadly storm of bullets that swept through their ranks. Of the ten men but one stood erect, unhurt; that one was **Thomas Bryant**.

He stood like one changed to stone, and his rifle dropped unheeded to the ground. The sight of his dead and dying friends and neighbors lying helplessly around him seemingly deprived him of the power of motion.

Then a score of forms sprung forth from their ambush, and while some seized upon the innkeeper, others began to plunder the dead. This rude assault aroused Bryant, and he struggled desperately, but in vain; he was borne to the ground, and his arms bound behind his back.

A cry of angry chagrin burst from his lips, as a tall form, with bandaged head, stood before him, with a triumphant sneer curling the thin lips. It was a picture that he had more than once mentally drawn, since starting upon the expedition, only in this the parts of the characters were reversed. **Steel Bonnett** was the victor; he the vanquished.

"You came out to shear and get shorn, Master Bryant," laughed the pirate chieftain. "How does the change please ye? I counted on something like this when I saw your spy prowling round us, but did not look for such rare fortune as to so soon serve your worshipful self."

"Then you saw—"

"Of course. A stupid fellow, that sort of yours, Master Bryant. We were only resting a bit when I saw the varlet, but then we improved a nice little tale by which to lure some of his kind here. Then, when he stole away so cunningly, as he believed, I signalled my men and lay in wait. But you have not thanked me yet for saving *your* life. Only for my orders, you would now be lying there with those carcasses, in no better sort than they," pointedly added Bennett.

"You—save my life—bah!" bitterly laughed Bryant.

"Nevertheless, 'tis true, *sheer* as you like. You will soon learn why; for be sure 'twas from no idle whim. I have further use to make of you. Hold there, my fellows, have done. Leave the varlets their hides and hair. Come, we must be making sail. I am anxious to finish up this job."

The party, led by Bennett, pressed through the tangled forest rapidly, Bryant being forced to keep pace, though with reluctance on his part, by the constant application of a sharp edge to the back of his neck. As he journeyed thus, he became aware that another prisoner was among the walking dead, Wykes.

An hour or so of rapid travelling brought them out upon the edge of the small bay before alluded to, where the steady-looking brigantine stood ready at anchor. Boats quickly came in obedience to Bennett's signal, and the entire party were conveyed to the vessel.

Bryant and Wykes were taken to the captain's cabin, where Dick Warley was snugly taking his ease. That perfect understanding existed between the two pirates was plainly evident, and Bennett lost little time in enlightening Bryant as to the meaning of his words upon shore.

"Now, Master Bryant, doubtless you are curious to know what object I could have had in sparing the lives of you two, in preference to others. Well, bear an ear and you shall learn, right speedily. You have not forgotten my playing the Partisan, and trying to carry off your daughter, the fair Mistress

Alice? And then, too, the other day—you have scarcely had time to forget that. You must know that I had an object in that, else I would not have taken so much trouble. I had, and that object was plainly this: I have taken a fancy to your child, and have even sworn that she should be mistress of this cabin, and of myself into the bargain. You comprehend my meaning?"

"Ay! d'ye hear that, eh, imp o' Satan?" roared Dick Worley, whose brain was rather obscured by the fumes of the strong liquor he had guzzled. "Devil comb your hair, varlet, why don't you thank the captain for the honor?"

"Peace, Bally Dick; this is my affair," uttered Bennett; then, turning to Bryant, he added: "Well, have you nothing to say?"

"What should I have to say? Thank God! my darling is beyond your power. Do with me as you will; that thought consoles me."

"You do not understand me yet, I see," was the cool reply. "You must write a note, such as I will dictate, bidding your daughter, Alice, to hasten hither at once, to pay obedience to the man whom you have chosen to be her husband."

Bryant laughed scornfully.

"Ah, you laugh? Good! That will not last long. You think I am crazy, but you err. You will do this that I ask of you," placidly added Bennett.

"Never—I will die first!" firmly cried Bryant.

"'Tis easy to say that—more easy than the reality. We will take good care that you do not die, though you will soon learn how to pray for that as a blessed release. I have to torture my future parent; but if he be obstinate, what can I do? I am impatient for my bride; if you hesitate, then we must use *persuasion*," and Steed Bennett laughed a devilish laugh.

"Kill me outright, but do not torture me," muttered Bryant.

"For shame! Why, my dear sir, that would be sheer murder! You counsel your son to stain his hands with such a crime? No, no; a little persuasion—nothing more," sneered Steed Bennett, as he turned to a sort of locker beneath his berth.

"You see these?" he added, facing round. "Neat, aren't they? Thumb-screws, we call them; useful as well as ornamental. And this—it strongly resembles a *griliron*, you see. Makes a nice cool seat, too; airy and comfortable. But with a little fire kindled beneath it—how then? You understand? It has remarkably persuasive power, then. However, I trust you will not force us to make use of it, as it usually leaves a most disagreeable odor in the cabin, and interferes with my repose. Here are still others, for use in more obstinate cases when, for instance, a miser loves his gold better than his own comfort. But whenever we have had occasion to make use of them, they proved all that was needed."

"You can not frighten me by such tales," replied Bryant, coolly, for he could not believe that Steel Bonnett really meditated such frightful extremes. "I will never consent to your wishes—so do your worst!"

"Then I will do even more than I threatened," hissed Bonnett, as he hurled Bryant to the floor. "Then you shall taste them all, unless you submit. I will put you to a thousand deaths, but what I conquer you!"

Then ensued a scene of diabolical barbarity, such as had made the name of Steel Bonnett infamous throughout the entire coast colonies. Assisted by Dick Worley they applied torture after torture, but for a time the iron will of the innkeeper baffled them.

"The 'griliron,' however, broke down the will of Bryant, and he begged for mercy. Suffering ten times more than death, he promised compliance with his captor's demands.

"Good! but had you not been a thrice cursed fool, we would have been spared all this trouble. However, better late than never, and I'll guarantee that your hurts will permit you to dance at my bridal—ha ha!" laughed the pirate in devilish triumph.

His will utterly crushed, for the time at least, Bryant wrote as Steel Bonnett directed. In substance it was as follows.

He was held a prisoner, and was doomed to suffer a horrible death unless Alice came to ransom him. What the price demanded, was, she would learn at the meeting. If she failed to come, at sunset of the fourth day Bryant would be put to

death. He prayed her by all she held most sacred not to destroy him; that she might be assured of kindly and courteous treatment, and if they could not come to amicable terms, she would be suffered to depart, free and unharmed.

To this, under protest, Thomas Bryant signed his name. Scarcely had he done so, than remorse seized upon him, and he attempted to destroy the foul missive, but Bennett seized the paper, and then Bryant was once more bound. Turning to where Wykes still stood, the pirate chieftain said:

"Now, sirrah, I had intended to feed the fish with your worthless carcass, but a man who is such a simpleton as this last scout of yours proves you to be, is not fit to die. So you may go back to your friends, after promising to deliver this letter into the hands of Mistress Alice Bryant—and none other than her. You beheld the father write it, so you can assure the lady that 'tis no forgery. If she hesitates you can just mention what you have seen here, and all that 'twill be renewed, unless she strictly follows the instructions contained in this paper. Do you understand?"

"Yes. I will do as you wish," muttered Wykes, with a glance toward Bryant, who had fallen into a sort of apathetic stupor.

"Very well, but look ye. If you fail, or play me false in any thing, I'll mete you such a turn that you will think we were only playing with Bryant a bit since. I'll find and serve you out, though you hide at the other end of the world."

"There needs no threats," suddenly muttered Wykes. "You have the upper hand—you know I must obey you."

Steel Bonnett laughed loudly, and then left the cabin, followed by the scout. A boat was lowered and Wykes quickly pulled to the shore, the pirate chieftain watching him until hidden from view by the thickly growing trees.

It was considerably after dark when Wykes reached the village, but, contrary to usual custom, he found it all as it, and his appearance, all alone, created instant and great excitement. The long absence of the venture commanded by Bryant had occasioned no little degree of wonder and alarm.

In low, faltering tones, Wykes told his tragic story, and

as the dread truth was fully realized, a stony calm settled over the colonists. But this lasted only for a moment.

Then those who had lost some loved one, gave free vent to their grief. It was a mournful and touching scene.

Alice Bryant had sunk to the ground in a swoon, as she heard of the ambush and massacre, for she believed that her father was also dead. Kindly hands attended to her, and when she woke to consciousness, she was in the inn.

Her eyes rested first upon the face of Wykes, and with a cry, she arose. Something in his looks terrified her, she scarcely knew why.

"Mistress Alice," he uttered, in a low tone, "your father is not dead—"

"Not—but no, you do not mean that—you are only trying to comfort me!" gasped Alice.

For an answer, Wykes thrust into her hand the note he had been commissioned to deliver. A cry of heartfelt joy burst from her lips as she drank in the words it contained.

Poor girl! she did not fathom the sinister meaning of the note. She only realized that her loved parent was still living, though kept a prisoner, held for ransom. That word seemed to indicate money; she gave it no other meaning.

"You think it over well, Mistress Alice," said Wykes, respectfully. "And let me know what you have decided upon, to-morrow morning. If you wish, I will take back your answer. The pirate let me go free with my life once. I doubt not he will again."

"Thank you, I—" began Alice, but Wykes did not pause for more.

"Mistress Alice, will you allow me to look at that note?" uttered a low voice, as the door closed behind the scout.

"Master Ingram—certainly, I am perplexed—nearly driven frantic, and can not think as clearly as I would wish. You are very kind—I wou'd like your opinion upon what I had better do in this sad affair," uttered Alice, brokenly, with the air of one in a quandary.

CHAPTER VIII.

A LOVER'S DARING.

JOHN INGRAM was one of those usually classed with the Cavaliers, though in many respects he differed widely from the generality of that sect. He was more sober, staid and quiet than most of the young hot-bloods, and more respectful toward the Puritans, as well as considerate regarding their peculiar characteristics.

Hence he was more popular with the latter sect, than any other of his clan. He often acted as mediator between the rival factions, and from his sound sense and logical reasonings, was respected by Cavalier and Puritan, both old and young.

He was handsome, tall and athletic, a master of all weapons in common use, a good scout and hunter. Very quiet and unobtrusive, when not angered, he had yet given evidence of a fearful temper when insulted or imposed upon, and few there were who cared to rouse the slumbering devil within his breast.

He had long been a suitor for the hand of pretty Alice, and Bryant, recognizing his sterling worth, favored his cause, until Alice chose Henry Howland. Though once plainly refused, Ingram did not despair of ultimate success, though he had the good sense not to obtrude his attentions beyond a certain point.

It was this man who had addressed Alice, as noted in the preceding chapter.

Ingram slowly and carefully read the note, and then glanced toward Alice, who had sunk into a chair. She could not wonder at the strange expression that rested upon his features.

"Alice, do you know what this means?"

"He demands ransom for father," filtered the maiden.

"I may be in error, but I fear there is something black concealed beneath this. If he only requires money, why does he dwell upon the importance of your coming in person to arrange terms? Why not anybody else?"

"It may be that he believes I would give more—I do not see what else," wearily added Alice.

"It *may* be—but I fear me that is not all. If gold alone was the pirate's object, why have killed all the others? Why only have saved your father? They were in force enough—as Wyck's says—to have captured them all without firing a shot. No—it does not seem right. I fear—"

Ingram abruptly checked the words that came to his lips, and his brows grew black as night at the thoughts thus conjured up. Alice felt a vague fear, as she spoke.

"What? Master Ingram, I have no one else to advise with—will you not serve me in this? I am only a poor, weak girl, and this shock has well nigh crazed me. Will you not speak out your fears, in plain words, that I may know what I have to encounter? Now, if ever, I need your friendship!" cried the maiden, beseechingly.

"I will—and God knows, Alice, that to serve you, or to save you from trouble and pain, I would gladly die. But never mind that now," he added, as the maiden's cheek flushed deeply. "You ask my advice, and I will give it as I would to my sister, were she still living. I think, then, that this about ransom money is simply a ruse to gain possession of you—on Steed Bonnett's part. No doubt he forced your father to write in this manner; perhaps used torture—he is none too good to do so."

"I do not speak this to give you pain, Alice, but it is best that you should see the matter in its darkest as well as lightest view. You will be better prepared for whatever comes, then."

"Well, you know that this man has already made two desperate attempts at your abduction. Do you think that now he has such a powerful hold upon you, through your father, he would suffer the chance to slip from his grasp for the sake of what little gold we can raise for the ransom money? I can not think it; the more I reflect, the deeper becomes my belief that he is only desirous of gaining possession of your person, and takes this method as being the one having the least danger to himself," earnestly added Ingram.

"But what can I do? You read what he threatens—he will kill poor father, if I do not comply!" sobbed Alice.

"It is hard, I know, but what better will it be if you both are in his power? It would be death to him, and worse than death for you. This is the blackest side of the matter, I know, but it is the one I honestly believe is nearest the truth. Still, he may be sincere, and if you wish, I will find out for you," slowly uttered the young man.

"You—but how? What do you mean?"

"Listen. If he really holds your father for ransom, he will not care through whom the money comes, just so it is paid into his hands. In that case it would only be putting you to unnecessary trouble and inconvenience, were you to visit him in person. Now I am willing to go and see if we can agree upon the terms. If he means well, there will be no harm done. If not—well, he at least will be foiled in gaining possession of you, Alice."

"But if not—as you say—what would be your fate? That dreadful pirate would kill you, for foiling his plans," murmured Alice.

"He might not. That is a risk I am willing to run, for the sake of serving you. Alice, if by giving up my own life, I could be sure I was saving you from that demon's power, I would count it the happiest deed of my life!" passionately cried Ingram, his deep love beaming forth from his glowing eyes.

"Don't—you promised—"

"Yes, I promised not to speak of my love, but it was more than I could perform. Alice, I only live for you, and—there; I forgot. Listen, I will start at once for this place, and see the pirate. I will do the best I can, and at any rate, that will be better than for you to go. You know I am a better bargainer than you are," and Ingram smiled constrainedly.

"But I do not like—I am afraid—"

"That is but natural; still, I am the one to go, if any. Rest assured I will do the best I can, both for your sake and for his. If I succeed, I will be here again, by to-morrow night, at furthest. If I do not come, you may be sure that my suspicions were correct—that Steel Bannett desires possession of your person, rather than your gold."

"But you will return, anyhow?"

"In the latter case, it is doubtful, to say the least. If he sees that his plans are suspected, Bonnett will not stop at trifles. But do not borrow trouble. Expect me here by that time. But on no account must you leave the house until you do hear from me. You can not be too cautious, now."

Ingram did not press for more, but pressing a hasty kiss upon the cold hand of the maiden, he turned and left the house. He had fully resolved upon the desperate venture, though he firmly believed that Steed Bonnett was simply working to gain possession of Alice, through her love for her father.

Ingram's first move was to seek out Wyckes, whom he found breaking his fast with the unction of one almost famished. By a series of cross-questions, he gained a correct idea of where the pirate vessel lay, so there would be little danger of his not finding it.

Wyckes was greatly astonished when he saw the drift of these questions, and strongly urged Ingram to reconsider his decision, declaring that such a course could work no possible good, and would be little less than absolute suicide. But the Cavalier was fully resolved, and then hastily preparing his weapons, he set forth upon his mission.

The night was dark and cloudy, while the route he must pursue was intricate and none of the plainest; so that the sun was high up in the heavens when John Ingram emerged from the forest, and stood out in full view of the brigantine. That good watch was maintained upon board, he speedily had evidence.

From a little group standing on deck he saw a glass leveled at him, and then a boat was hastily lowered. Though wondering a little at this prompt movement, that would seem to indicate his arrival was expected, Ingram advanced to the water's edge, and calmly awaited their approach.

"Aye! there--what do you wish?" came in a strong, clear voice from the boat.

"To visit the vessel you'er, if it be that commanded by Steed Bonnett," promptly replied Ingram.

"Your name, please?"

"That concerns your master, not you. Pull in and take me aboard."

"I recognize no master save the King of Spain. You will do well to moderate your tone, young sir. Such high and mighty airs do not relish well with us Free Rovers."

"Ah, I recognize you now. If I err not, we had the pleasure of crossing swords, not long since. You are Steed Bonnett?" coolly returned Ingram.

"I am; pull in, ballies. I like the fellow's impudence, and we will settle his business on board, over a stoap of wine. You say you have business with me?" he added, as the boat grounded upon the beach.

"Yes, I have."

"Very well, then; you must come aboard. Step in."

Ingram didn't hesitate, for he knew that to do so would be useless, if not fatal. The crew were all armed, and were men who seemed in no wise loth to use their weapons. Matters could be no worse in the vessel than there.

A few minutes more found the two seated in the cosy cabin, though now no evidence remained to tell of the barbarities it had so recently witnessed. Not until wine had been drank and cigars lighted, would Steed Bonnett permit business to be mentioned.

"Now, my dear sir," he said, removing from his lips the fragile wine-glass, "since it must be, let us get over this business—pah! the very word parches my throat!—and then enjoy ourselves. A gentleman who flashes steel as a troitly as you, ought to be a jovial companion for a drinking bout. Then out with it; but, I pray you, make it as brief as possible."

"Very well; I will do so. You hold our friend and fellow-townsmen, Thomas Bryant, a prisoner, for ransom?"

"Ah; so you come upon that matter, then?" and the brows of the pirate chieftain corrugated and grew black, while his eyes glittered ominously. "What message did the man—Wykes, I believe, is his name—what was the message he delivered from me?"

Ingram briefly detailed the purport of the scout's report. Bonnett smiled grimly.

"Good! I feared the varlet had made some mistake. But instead, it appears you are the one at fault. You surely do not claim to be the daughter of this Bryant?"

“ Scarcely. But you specified a certain time of grace, and as Mistress Alice was so completely overcome by the tidings as to be unable to leave her bed, I received her instructions and came prepared to act as her deputy.”

“ You have your trouble for your pains, then. There can be no go-between. If the lady does not come in person, as I proposed, her father will be the sufferer. Four days is the limit; at the end of that time, he dies such a death as never before was called upon to undergo. To show you that I am not idly jesting, let me give you a hint as to what he has already received.”

Bonnett clearly and concisely detailed the tortures to which Bryant had been subjected. It required all Ingram's strength of will to listen to the narrative, and not clutch the cold-blooded monster by the throat and strangle the foul recital in its utterance.

“ I did not in the least doubt your assertion,” said the Cavalier, as soon as he could master his rage. “ But tell me why you insist on the lady's coming here in person? What need is there of that?”

“ That is my affair. Rest assured that I have my reasons—and good ones, too—for it.”

“ Do you think that, through her fears, you could drive a better bargain with her than with me? If so, you mistake. Name your price, and if it can be raised in the settlement, I pledge you my honor as a gentleman, that the amount shall be paid into your hands, or in any manner you may wish. We are not wealthy, but what we can will be gladly given to free our friend.”

“ I will bargain with Mistress Alice—none other,” decidedly replied Bonnett.

“ You may mean well; but if you reflect, you must see how suspicious this resolve of yours appears. There can be no possible advantage to you in bargaining with her, since I offer you all we can possibly pay; she can do no more. Then why insist on her presence here? Add to this your twice attempting to abduct her from her home and friends, and what is the natural conclusion? Why simply that you seek to obtain possession of her, without incurring the risk of an other attack upon the settlement?”

"And supposing I acknowledge that your reasoning is correct?" sneeringly demanded Bonnett.

"Then you will fail. She will never come here, while your real purpose is so thinly disguised. To do so would not save her father, but would only result in her own destruction," promptly replied Ingram.

"Good! you speak plain, and so will I. My plan was exactly as you have guessed. I have a hold upon the fair Alice, and mean that it shall gain me possession of her."

"That you will never do. She knows—or will, when she learns the result of my visit—your vile plans, and will foil them," hotly said Ingram, anger getting the better of his prudence.

"And to whom is she indebted for that knowledge? You know—and so do I!—she would never have suspected aught had not *you* convinced her that I meant her foul. You made her believe this, and in doing so you sealed your own doom. Ha! touch that pistol—make one motion toward a weapon, and you are a dead man!" hoarsely cried the pirate, as his hand flashed out from beneath the table, leveling a cocked pistol full at the head of the Cavalier.

Ingram saw that a movement toward drawing a weapon would be his death-warrant, and so remained quiet. But he did not lose his coolness and presence of mind.

"You see I know all," resumed Steel Bonnett, in a malignant tone. "My arms reach even into your own home. I have paid spies there, though you know it not. One of them overheard your conversation with Alice Bryant, and reported it to me, an hour before your arrival. You were wise in preparing for your not returning home. You will never see her again, for— *Take him, men!*"

The last words were spoken loudly, and before Ingram could make a movement to defend himself, he was seized from behind and hurled heavily to the floor. Then, while some held him motionless, other hands actively bound him beyond the possibility of escape, while Steel Bonnett laughed long and loudly at the Cavalier's discomfiture.

As the seamen rose from this duty, they stood by in silence, as if awaiting the further commands of their chief. Steel Bonnett sat leaning one arm upon the table, idly playing

with the pistol, his dark eyes keenly searching the face of his captive.

"Well, my good friend," he at length uttered, in a sneering tone of voice, "how like you the situation? There only remains the last act; how shall it end: by bullet, cord or water?"

"Work your will while you can. I will not demean myself by bandying words with such as you," quietly retorted Ingram.

"Plucky, by my soul! A pity you were born to die so soon! Ha! I have it!" and a glow of fiendish glee lighted up the pale face. "I will spare your life on one condition."

"And that condition is—"

"That you take a message to the village for me. Will you do it?"

"Tell me the message, first."

"You dare to parley—insolent dog! Say yes or no, and speedily, too," said the pirate, in a rage.

"I dare more than you think, perhaps. But I will agree providing there be nothing dishonorable to the bearer, in the message. If it be such as a gentleman can deliver, I will do so."

"All right. Mulkey, cast off the lashings from his legs, there, and then follow me to the other hold. Keep your eye on him, lest he should take a notion to try the water for it."

Steel Bonnett led the way down into the hold, that was lighted only by a dim swinging lamp. Here Ingram saw fully a dozen forms, lying helplessly bound upon the flooring, some of whom were white, others black.

"You see," laughed the pirate, "this iron treasure-room. These—the whites, at least—are all rich men, whom I am holding for ransom. It is merely to keep my hands from rusting while waiting for the time when we shall be prepared to strike the first grand blow for Spain. Look yonder—beneath the light. There is your friend, Bryant."

Ingram gave a low cry of horror, and would have sprung forward, had not the strong grasp of Mulkey checked him. He could scarce believe that this was the innkeeper.

The usually florid face was now so pale and livid, while his form even seemed emaciated, though a captive for so

brief a time. Traces of the terrible torture to which he had been subjected were plainly visible through the tattered garments that but ill covered his person.

"You see that I did not lie to you," complacently returned Steed Bonnett. "I did not tell you half the truth. But since you have been so obstinate, I wish you to understand fully. You think he has suffered, but you are wrong. The pain which he has already undergone is but pay—only a partial enjoyment—to what he will be subjected to, if his daughter refuses to comply with my wishes. If she comes to settle the terms of ransom, I swear by our Lady, that I will deal faithfully with her. The life of her father rests entirely in her hands. If she comes, all well. If not, he dies, and I will combine with the Indians to attack the village, put all to the sword save her. Then before her very eyes, I will have that old man tortured to death. Do you comprehend me fully?"

John Ingram shuddered as he turned away from that baleful glare sick at heart. Steed Bonnett laughed discordantly, as he added:

"Take him above, Mulkey. It is time he was upon his return journey."

Ingram was led to the ship's side, where a boat lay in readiness. Bonnett stood close beside the Cavalier, a sinister smile curling his thin lip.

"Understand me, Master Ingram; you promised to deliver a message. You have it already. It comprises all that you have seen and heard while in this vessel. What did I promise as a reward for this?"

"My life and freedom," coldly returned Ingram.

"Exactly; and I will keep my word. But there is one thing that I can not forget. You came here, meditating me treachery—and never yet did man do that without receiving his reward at my hands. You deserve one—and here I give it you!"

At a sign from their leader, two stout men grasped the Cavalier, holding him firmly. Then Steed Bonnett, with a ferocious laugh, drew his knife, and, one after the other, he severed Ingram's ears from his head!

One single cry of agony burst from the victim's throat, but

that was all. Then he stood as if turned to a statue of stone, his eyes, hot and glowing as a living coal, riveted upon the face of his mutilator.

Instinctively Bonnett shrunk back, trembling with a sudden terror. Never before had single man filled his heart with like feeling. Never before had he encountered a glare containing such horrible hatred and vindictiveness.

But the pirate quickly cast off this sensation, and with a bitter curse he ordered the captive to be taken ashore. As Ingram entered the boat, Bonnett flung after him the gory cars.

Ingram kept his eyes fixed upon the face of the man who had thus terribly mutilated him, until the boat's prow touched shore. Then his bonds were cut, and as the seamen pulled back to the vessel, they saw the Cavalier kneel down upon the damp sands and, with uplifted hands, appear calling down the vengeance of Heaven.

CHAPTER IX.

A LIFE FOR AN EAR!

AND such indeed was the purport of John Ingram's prayer. As he knelt there he vowed by all that he held most sacred and holy, to wreak a bloody vengeance upon the devil incarnate who had so horribly marked him.

It has been noted that though usually quiet and reserved, Ingram possessed a temper that, once crossed, was ungovernable. And never before had the sleeping demon been so completely aroused.

Had Stuart Bonnett, before and during as he undoubtedly was, suspected what a devil he was creating, he would have thought twice before committing that act. As it was, he had made an enemy whom death alone could appease.

Ingram arose and entered the forest. Already his resolve was formed, and he only awaited the proper moment to put it into execution.

He soon passed beneath a wide-spreading tree, and then

lightly scaled it, until at a point from whence he could observe the brigantine. Not until then did he bandage up the bleeding ear-stumps.

Scarcely was this accomplished, than he started violently, while a glare, wild and deadly, filled his eyes. A boat was just leaving the brigantine's side, and coming directly toward him. In its stern sat a man whom, even at that distance, he thought he recognized.

With a cold, fiendish smile, John Ingram drew the knife from his belt, and carefully tested its edge and point. Then he awaited, his eyes riveted upon the swiftly approaching boat.

As it landed the man sprung out, and Ingram saw that his surmise was correct. Without hesitating, the man entered the forest, passing directly beneath the tree in which crouched the avenger.

Scarcely had he passed by than Ingram dropped lightly to the ground and glided forward in pursuit. A few moments sufficed to bring him in sight of his victim, and then with a fierce, snarling scream, he bounded forward and pounced upon the terrified man.

Ingram seemed possessed of supernatural strength, for though the other was a powerful man, he seemed but a child in the Cavalier's grasp. The deadly grip upon his throat checked all outcry, and then Ingram knelt upon the man's back, while with one hand he drew his knife.

"Mercy—mercy!" gasped the wretch, as the relaxed grip allowed him to gain breath. "I am a friend—Master Ingram—don't you know me?"

"Yes. I know you," snarled the madman; for such in reality he seemed. "You betrayed me into that devil's hands. You were his spy—you have been the cause of all this, even while pretending to serve us. You were the cause of my being mutilated—of being an ear-cropped wretch! Harold Wykes, your time has come—you must die!"

The detected traitor pleaded and begged for mercy, but in vain. The man whose wrongs might all be traced back to the one who now lay beneath his knee, was inexorable.

The gleaming knife rose and fell. As Scott Burton had done but a short time previously, so did John Ingram now. One by one the traitor's ears fell, and then the fingers of his

guish were forever stilled by one desperate blow ; a blow that fairly clove his traitorous heart in twain.

John Ingram arose and contemplated the ghastly trophies that lay in the palm of his hand, for a moment, in silence. Then a low laugh, hollow and unnatural, broke from his lips, as he spurned the still quivering corpse with his foot, and turning, he glided back and once more ascended to his perch in the tree.

Not for a moment did he believe that he had done any thing more than to wreak a just retribution upon Wyckes. Steed Bonnett had said it was a spy that told him the real purport of the Cavalier's visit. Wyckes had been at the village when Ingram left it. Then, if not the spy, how came it that he was aboard the pirate vessel so soon, and why had he been suffered to depart, unharmed ?

And in the reasoning, Ingram was correct. Wyckes was indeed a spy of the pirates. He led the party under Bryant into ambush purposely, in accordance with a plan projected by Steed Bonnett. He had hastened after Ingram, to betray his real purpose, and, owing to a better knowledge of the route, had passed the Cavalier. Hence it was that there was no delay in admitting the messenger to an audience. His reward, though terrible, was just.

Crouching in his leafy covert, John Ingram watched the brigantine with untiring eyes, until the sun sunk to rest and the shades of night came over the earth. He saw the vessel gradually become more dim and indistinct, until almost lost from sight, but he knew that it still occupied the same spot.

His mind was now only filled with one thought ; vengeance. That night he had resolved, Steed Bonnett must die.

He thought not of what would be his own fate ; for that he cared little. He could never face his comrades again, now that he bore that humiliating and shameful brand.

With the patience of an Indian upon the death-trail John Ingram waited and watched. The night was still and calm, though the sky was overcast by murky clouds, through which the moon and stars shone but faintly.

This fact was an aid, rather than a hindrance to him, in

his projected vengeance. By midnight he hoped his work would be completed.

An hour before that time, or nearly as he could guess, John Ingram descended from the tree, and glided down to the beach. Here he quickly removed his clothing, and with only his knife belted around his body, he entered the water, striking out boldly and skillfully toward the spot where he could just distinguish the spars of the brigantine outlined against the sky.

Steadily, with ease and rapidity, he covered the half mile of water, and then, clinging to the swaying cable, he rested. All above was still and silent; not a sound could he hear from on board, and it seemed as though the entire ship's crew were sleeping soundly in fancied security.

Then, slowly and cautiously, John Ingram crawled up the cable and gained the deck, unseen. He glanced keenly around him, with a sigh of relief.

Only one man could be seen, and he was evidently asleep upon watch. It seemed as though Satan, Steel Bennett's master, had for once deserted that worthy, and abandoned him to a richly-merited fate.

Crossing the deck, Ingram crawled along in the densest shadows, and then, unseen and unheard, he gained the door of the pirate captain's cabin. As he slowly opened the door, a faint light shone forth. Ingram paused to listen.

He could hear the heavy, even breathing that seemed to say his anticipated victim was soundly sleeping. An expression of demoniac glee rested upon Ingram's features as he drew his knife, still red with the heart's blood of one victim, and clutched it with a vengeful grip.

Then he entered the cabin. His wildly-beaming eyes swept around, and quickly alighted upon the figure of his enemy lying in his berth, buried deep in peaceful slumber.

A low, hoarse, grating snarl parted the man's lips as he recognized the pirate chieftain, and with the purposeful action of a beast of prey, he glided forward, his gore-stained knife poised ready to deal the vengeful blow. The salt water had started afresh the flow of blood from his wounded head, and the crimson streams that trickled down his face and neck, added to the significant picture.

Ingram gained the berth-side, and crouched to deal the avenging stroke. But it was not so ordained.

Even as his muscles hardened for the effort, a sharp pistol-crack rang out; the uplifted arm sunk to his side, the steel knife fell clattering to the floor, and a cry of mingled pain and rage burst from the avenger's lips, as he sunk back, and fell down dead in the moment of triumph.

Soon Bonnett started up with a cry of wondering alarm, he seized upon the weapons that ever lay to his hand. But a voice—that of his trusty lieutenant—reassured him.

"I fired the shot, captain, at your reptile. There is but the one, I believe," and springing from his berth, the man dealt Ingram a forcible kick that hurled him back once more to the floor, from which he had essayed to arise.

An increasing tumult without, told that the crew had been aroused by the shot, and Bonnett bade his officer go and quell it, while he looked to the wounded intruder. Saying this he sprung to the floor and stooped over Ingram.

"Ha!" he cried, starting back as the wounded man viciously thrust at his heart with the regained knife, its keen point just raising the skin of his breast, "venomous reptile—who are you?"

"You ought to know me—it has not been so long since we parted," uttered Ingram, faintly, for the sands of life were rapidly ebbing out.

The bullet had struck him fairly in the left breast, and at each close quarters had sunk deep into the vitals. The light, frothy blood that oozed from the wound told that he had not long to live.

"Ha! 'tis you, then?"

"Yes, and may God wither the hand that checked me, even as I was about to complete my vengeance! Another moment—only one—and you would have died: died even as your spy and tool died, by my hand."

"What? Who do you mean by that?" cried Bonnett, eagerly.

"Harold Wykes—the man who betrayed me to you. I watched for and killed him when he left this vessel. Then I came to kill you—curses on the head of the man who foiled me!"

"And bless him, say I! But you failed—that is good. You can guess the penalty?"

"Bah! I am dying now—do your worst. My only regret is that I failed to rid the world of your villainous life," scornfully retorted the dying Cavalier.

Bonnett by this time had donned his outer garments, and in obedience to his summons, Mulkey entered.

"Call a couple of men and heave this carrion overboard. Quick!"

This brutal command was promptly executed, and the fast-dying breath of the unfortunate Cavalier was forever extinguished by the bitter waters.

CHAPTER X.

THROUGH THE TOILS.

THE defiant yell of the outcast chief, coming so unexpectedly, for a moment seemed to paralyze the Coosaw warriors, but then, with one accord they sought cover, darting back below the bench, or else to either side, out of range of the den. They now plainly saw that a difficult piece of work was cut out for them.

The three refugees employed this respite in recharging their firearms, knowing right well that more was to come. This was only the first gust; what followed would be more serious.

Then Red Dan and Howland found time to clasp hands and greet each other warmly. It was like the meeting of friends from beyond the grave.

"The chief saved you too, did he, lad?" asked Red Dan, curiously.

"Yes, and in doing so he killed a Coosaw—"

"What?"

"Helping Hand speaks the truth," uttered Silence, observing Red Dan's bewilderment. "The Coosaws believed Silence to be a traitor, and chose Chinaber to fill their chief's

robe. Hoooh! the Coosaws have put on the skins of dogs and crawl on four legs! Silouee is no longer a Coosaw. They may point at him as the outcast chief, but they shall soon learn to run and hide their heads in the dirt at his coming, lest he tear off their scalp locks to trail at the heel of his moccasins. Silouee will paint his face white. He will go on the war path with Fire Scalp and Helping Hand. Never more will he strike a white-skin. But his arm shall be red to the shoulder with the blood of the Coosaw, the Creek and the Cherokee!" cried Silouee, his voice rising and swelling in volume as his mad passions found vent in words.

"Your land on that, chief," muttered Red Dan. "It's a bargain. We three will go together, an' ef we don't jest actually make the far fly, then call me a nigger. How is it 'th you, Harry?"

"Very good. We'll be known as the 'League of Three,' provided, of course, we ever get out of this trap alive," laughingly replied Howland, though with a voice of uneasiness beneath his words.

Howland felt uneasy as he weighed well the situation, but to his surprise, both the others seemed perfectly calm and unconcerned at the ultimate result.

"Supposing they make a rush?" he whispered to Red Dan. "Won't they force an entrance?"

"Surely. The door—by which I mean that dornick, yonder—is locked. That is to say, speakin' plainly, the devil himself might batt all the skin ed'n his shoulders tryin' to push it in, 'taout bad gin' it a mite. Ye see, it's fastened with wedges, an—"

The scout's explanation was drowned by the report of his rifle, as he hastily threw it up to a level and fired. A silent chuckle parted his lips as he rolled over upon his back and began recharging his gun.

A wild chorus of yells and screams went up from without, and the firing abruptly ceased. The next moment there came a tremendous jar, that seemed to shake even the rocky sides of the den. The Coosaws were trying to remove the bowlder by means of a heavy battering-ram.

Silouee and Howland both fired, and the cries of pain that

followed plainly told that their bullets had not been wasted. In a few moments the second assault came, and by that time Red Dan was ready.

As his rifle spoke, the enemy fell back and abandoned the attempt. Their two rushes, given with all possible force, had not affected the stability of the boulder in the least. They saw that this plan was a failure.

"How d'ye like my patent lock, now, Harry?" chuckled Red Dan, in high glee.

"It is good—but still, I do not see any way of escape from this fix. We may possibly kill a few of the devils, but in what will that benefit us?"

"Rest easy, lad. Thar is a way, though it may prove a trifle tryin' to the narves. We'll leave this hole, jest as soon's it's dark."

A new and significant sound from without diverted Howland's mind from this enigma, and gave them all a feeling of uneasiness. They each one divined the real nature of the peril.

"*They're going to smoke us out!*" cried Howland.

Red Dan and the chief glanced at each other, and then the outcast chief uttered a few rapid words in his own tongue, the meaning of which the young scout did not catch. Red Dan promptly replied by stripping off his buck-skin hunting-shirt: a move in which he was imitated by Silence.

"You, Harry," muttered the old scout, "off 'th' you—dats—*quick!*"

"What do you mean?"

"Never mind—no time to talk—do as I say, darn ye!" was the angry reply. "Take an' tie these together, an' 'member that on each knot may depend your life. Tie 'em for keeps—*quick!*"

Under the keen knives of the two men, the garments were quickly converted into long strips, and then all three were hastily twisting and knotting them into a long rope. All this consumed time, and their danger was momentarily drawing near.

The brushwood pile was rapidly accumulating before the entrance, and but a short time would elapse before the torch was applied. That done, ten minutes would suffice to render the den untenable.

"Thar it is—quile it up, chief, while I onkiver the hole," muttered Red Dan, springing to his feet.

His meaning was speedily explained, for as he reached the back of the cave, he knelt down and commenced tearing away a small heap of earth that formed a sort of slope, running against the back of the den, seemingly having accumulated there by the earth gradually sifting down from the wall. But such was not the case; that little mound was the work of human hands.

The loose earth was pushed aside, and a flat stone of some two feet or more square, was revealed, resting in a slanting position against the rock that projected from the wall. When this was thrown aside, a narrow aperture was revealed, into which the air rushed with a force that told Howland there must be a clear passage leading out to the open air.

A cry of wonder broke from his lips as he saw this. He now understood why Red Dan had spoken so confidently of escape, but a short time previously.

"How is it, chief?" asked Red Dan, turning his head.

"Silence is ready," replied the outcast, arising, with the rope coiled around his body in such a manner as left him the free use of his arms.

"Just in time, too, for see! there goes the fire!" muttered Howland, pointing toward the cave entrance, where could be distinguished a faint blaze from which the smoke already began to ooze into the den.

"Thar's time a-plenty. Jest give the imps a far'well shot, so they won't s'picion nothin' wrong. It'll make 'em think we're gettin' desp'rate, an' they won't think o' watchin' nothin' else 'cept the hole."

The three rifles rung out, and were echoed back by shrill and exultant yells from the Coosaws without. Silence once more pealed forth his war-cry, in all its ferocity.

No reply came to this. Evidently the Coosaws still entertained a wholesome respect for the one who had so often led them on to victory, and whose valor had no equal in the entire tribe, though now an outcast.

Red Dan was the last to enter the passage, which he had not explored, as he little thought of ever being driven to make use of it as the only means of saving his life.

That there was an aperture still, the rushing air evidenced, but, might it not be so choked up as to prevent the passage of a man? He doubted not, in such a case, but that it could be cleared out; still, that would require time.

The smoke was already being driven into the hole. How long before it would be filled as bad as the den? If the tunnel was seriously obstructed, they would be strangled before being able to clear it.

His ready wit, however, devised a mode by which that peril could be averted, and he lost no time in putting it into operation. As he backed into the tunnel, he raised the flat slab and placed it in its former position. Then with his knife, he attacked the earthen sides of the mouth.

"Lend a hand here," he muttered, as the others passed to learn the cause of his delay. "We must check the hole full, or the cursed smoke 'll git us yit!"

This precaution taken, the trio, with Red Dan in the van, slowly and laboriously crawled along the passage, at times finding it a close shave, at others proceeding with comparative ease. To Howland, the passage seemed incredibly long, though in reality they traversed but a few yards, before there appeared a ray of light in front, and a glad cry from Red Dan announced their arrival at the end.

Howland now saw why the rope had been made. They had come out upon the face of the precipice, nearly a hundred feet above its base!

"Unquile the rope, chief," said Red Dan. "This point of rock 'll do, I reckon, to hitch it to. Hope it's long enough, for ef 'tain't, we'll be in a nice fix—I guess not!"

But, fortunately, the rope proved of ample length, and with the three rifles attached, was lowered to the ground. Then came the question as to who should descend first. It was the position of danger, and yet each one contended for it.

"No, I'll go," decisively uttered Red Dan. "I'm the best feller, and ef it'll bar me, you two won't be 'st in. I'll go now, an' keep it from rubbin' on the sharp edge there. Put your cap under it, Howy."

Slowly and cautiously Red Dan slowly lowered the coil of cord upon which his life was to depend, and then over the

dizzy light, and then hung suspended in mid-air. Inch by inch, foot by foot, he allowed the rope to pass through his hands, and his heart beat more evenly as he neared the bottom.

He soon reached the ground in safety, and the rope being thus thoroughly tested, Howland next made the venture, while the old scout busied himself with recharging the three rifles.

Silouee began his descent with more alacrity than either of his comrades had displayed, but he was fated to encounter a peril as imminent as it was unexpected, before touching ground.

A shrill yell, coming from above, startled him, and raising his eyes, the eagerest chief beheld several forms upon the extreme summit of the hill, whose extravagant gestures told they had discovered the refugees. Then, as Silouee continued his descent, the rifles of the savages above began to speak, and the bullets hissed venomously around his person.

But in firing directly beneath one, it is extremely difficult to secure an accurate aim, and not one of the missiles touched the eagerest chief. Before a second round could be fired, he had gained the ground, and seizing his weapons, Silouee hurled forth his defiant war-cry.

"Quick! these imps 'll tell 't others, an' they'll be on our track, hot foot, in a minnit. It's run, now, an' do your darndest, too!" said Red Dan, as he started off down the valley, at full speed.

The peculiar formation of the ground here favored the fugitives greatly. The Indians, in order to gain their trail, had made a wide *detour*, while a free route lay before the refugees, and every step taken lessened the distance that lay between them and the settlement.

Appreciating the advantages of a goodly start, Red Dan and his comrades at a rushing rate for several miles, when they slackened their pace, as they were once more within the dense woods, and comparatively safe from their pursuers.

Thus they proceeded with more deliberation, though they were very anxious to gain the settlement, knowing, as they did, the brewing storm that threatened its destruction.

As the sun set, they ate a hearty meal from a deer shot by Red Dan, and then journeyed on for several miles farther to a more secure resting-place. With the morning's gray they were afoot, and without farther adventures of moment, gained the little village where such stormy scenes had transpired since their departure.

Both Howland and Silonce proceeded direct to the inn. The glad tidings of the arrival of the two scouts, whom all had feared were dead, had already reached Alice, and she met her lover at the threshold.

"Thank God! Harry," she murmured, brokenly. "Thank God that you at least are spared me!"

The Cavalier's strong arms wound around her lithe form, and clasped her to his breast, while his bearded lips pressed ardent caresses upon her pallid cheeks and quivering lips. Worn and weakened by her sore trials, Alice clung to him and sobbed piteously.

They neither gave a thought to the looker-on. Silonce, the outcast chief, stood beside the threshold, like one petrified. He saw all; he noted the willingly-received caresses, saw them returned, and knew that he beheld the favored lover of the maiden whom, though of a different race, he himself loved so passionately.

It was a bitter blow to him; the more so from coming from such an unexpected quarter. Never once had he thought of helping Harry as a rival.

He knew that Ayoama loved this man; he had believed from the pale-face's actions, that this love was returned. Thus, in the first flush of anger, it seemed as though the hand of a trusted friend had dealt him a treacherous blow.

The eyes of the outcast chief glittered fiercely, and a hand dropped upon the knife-hilt at his waist. But then with a violent effort of will, he turned and strode away.

Upon a log by the street-side he seated himself, and with head bowed upon his hands, seemed pondering over this new development. A strange expression settled down upon his features. A burning glow filled his eyes, and he glanced hastily around him, as though fearing the stealthy approach of an enemy.

Red Dan came by and spoke to him. The outcast chief

quickly glanced up, and the old scout started back, uttering a cry of wonder.

"Why, chief, what's up? Your eyes air afire, an' the devil hisself seems a-lookin' out o' your whole face!"

CHAPTER XI.

BURSTING BONDS.

Once more we must revert to the pirate brigantine, the Albatross, where, among others, Thomas Bryant is still held a prisoner. Though the end of grace allowed for ransom is rapidly drawing nigh; the sun for the fourth time is nearing the western horizon.

There is little stir or bustle on board; with the exception of half a dozen men idly lolling at their ease on deck, the vessel seems deserted. In truth, with the exception of the prisoners, these are the only inmates of the vessel.

Steed Bonnett, with the rest of the pirates, had departed that morning, in boats, bound upon some expedition. A message from Dick Worley being the prime cause.

As stated, the hold contained over a dozen persons, both black and white; the former detained for ransom, the latter doomed to be sold into slavery.

Thomas Bryant had, in a great measure, recovered from the effects of his tortures, and knowing his probable fate, resolved upon escape, if it lay in human power to accomplish such a task. It seemed impossible to free their limbs from the heavy iron manacles, but it had been accomplished.

Steed Bonnett that morning had told Bryant that as the sun set, he should be tortured to death in presence of the entire command, including that of Worley, for whom he was going to send. This it was that precipitated matters.

As the guard brought them their food and drink, at noon, Bryant watched his opportunity, and clubbing his heavy chains, he felled the pirate, crushing his skull like an egg-shell. With the key found on his person, the irons were speedily removed.

In the gloom, the late captives groped around for weapons, but the hand-spikes or sticks that they found, seemed but poor substitutes. Not contented with these, Bryant succeeded in making his way into the cabin, where he obtained plenty of cutlasses, pistols, and two or three fusils, the firearms ready loaded.

With vindictive yells of vengeance, the desperate men rushed to the deck and assailed their bewildered guard. For a few moments a fearful scene ensued, but then it was ended.

Taken completely by surprise, the pirates offered but slight resistance. They had no weapons at hand save their sheath-knives. One and all were ruthlessly slaughtered, the infuriated settlers, in revenge for the wrongs they had suffered, not ceasing their strokes while even the semblance of life remained.

But scarce was this victory declared, when another peril threatened them; one far more imminent, that bade fair to undo all that they had thus far wrought out. The keen eyes of Thomas Bryant were the first to detect it.

"Look yonder! they are coming back! It is the other vessel!" and his outstretched hand guided the eyes of all seaward, where, rapidly nearing them, was a vessel almost the counterpart of the Albatross.

Most of them had seen it before, and recognized it for the pirate's consort, Dick Worley's Bonita. That the pirates suspected something wrong, was evident from their basical moving to and fro, and from the working of their guns.

"My God!" groaned one man. "We are lost!"

"Not so—not so. There is time yet," cried Bryant. "Down with the boat—it is large enough to contain us all, and we can escape them by taking to the woods. Quick! it is for your lives!"

Inspired by his words, the men sprang to their tasks. Bryant called one of the slaves to him.

"Come and help me bring up firearms and cartridges. If they overtake us, we must show fight. To be taken now, means worse than death. They would murder us by inches!"

In a brief time the entire party were in the boat, and pulling hard for land. The pirate vessel was nearing them, and were preparing their boats to make chase. The fugitives had

presence of mind enough to keep her in line with the Albatross, so they were shielded from her guns.

By the time the shore was reached, Bryant and his assistants had the weapons loaded, and seizing them they plunged into the forest. The pirates were only a short distance behind them, and all felt that a collision must speedily ensue. The lowering brows and compressed lips of the fugitives told plainly that their enemies would have no bloodless victory to boast over, in such a case.

"Here, men, we must stop and fight the demons. Pick your stand, and do not waste your bullets."

With defiant cheers, the fugitives sprung into the midst of a windrow, that crossed their path. Each man chose his covert, and then cocked his weapons.

As the foremost pirate appeared, a bullet from Bryant's fusil sent him groaning to his last account. Then, as his comrades sprung forward, report after report, in quick succession, gave evidence to those in the rear that their intended prey had turned at bay.

A rush was made as the pirates all came up. Over or under the ragged timbers they swarmed, and then cold steel began to perform its part of the tragedy.

Simultaneously all paused and stood with a startled air. The forest echoed with sounds not made by them: shouts, cheers, and then came the rattling of firearms, the hissing of bullets, the cries and groans of the wounded and dying!

Only for a brief moment lasted this indecision. Then the pirate crew turned and fled, with wild yells of angry dismay. They recognized a deadly foe in the new-comers.

They were not pursued far. The relieving party were too wise for that. Their numbers were scarcely as many as those of the now fugitives, though surprise trebled the count.

It was a joyous meeting as Thomas Bryant came forth and led his friends and townsmen; for it was indeed the villagers, led by Red Dan and Henry Howland. On hearing the tidings, the two scouts had called for volunteers, and then, leaving their women and children in the block-house for safety, they had set forth, arriving so opportunely.

Their loss had been but slight: two men killed, among the fugitives, one a slave. Though hoping thus, none could find

Steed Bonnett among the slain. He had again escaped a richly-merited doom.

In triumph the party marched back to the village. Little dreamed they of the terrible blow that awaited them there. Their joy was soon to give place to gloom and sorrow.

CHAPTER XII.

BREAST TO BREAST.

THE blow was dealt by a hand they had all believed to be friendly—Silouee, the outcast. Not until this did they notice his absence from their party, for he had been with them when they started.

Alice Bryant had returned to the inn for some forgotten article, when her voice was heard, and then the outcast chief darted away toward the forest, bearing in his arms the struggling maiden. The two men left as a guard dared not desert their charge, and so nothing had been done.

As soon as the first surprise was over, a party prepared to start after the abductor. When they came to look for Red Dan to guide them, he was not to be found.

The party divided, and while one hastened forward at full speed, the other followed the trail. Before nightfall, short as was that time, they had lost all traces of the outcast.

It was the second night, following the abduction. A single man was standing upon a high hill, the top of which was bare and bold.

That man was Red Dan. He had been following up the outcast chief, and his trail had led to the hill where he now stood peering intently out upon the land before him. The faint glow of a camp fire met his gaze.

Glancing down the hillside, Red Dan approached the camp fire.

Cautious scouting showed him a place where he might enter, without prematurely alarming the occupants of the glade.

Then crouching low down, he parted the leafy screen and gazed into the glade. It contained only two persons; man and woman—Alice Bryant and Silouee, the outcast chief.

For a moment Red Dan seemed at a loss. By raising his rifle, he could easily slay the outcast, and thus free the maiden, but his soul revolted at this; the man, there, had saved his life—they had pledged eternal friendship, and had called each other brother. He could not shoot him down unawares.

Red Dan arose and stepped into the glade, where the full glow of the firelight fell upon his form. The Indian sprang forward with leveled rifle, but the scout did not flinch, neither did he raise a weapon. Gravely he inclined his head, and then advanced to the fireside.

Alice gazed at him in doubt. This strange action took her completely by surprise. Though she wished to appeal to him for help, a vague fear restrained the words.

Silouee stood as if perplexed, gazing keenly upon the old scout. Red Dan appeared not to notice this, but crouched down before the fire, slowly filling his pipe. Igniting it, he puffed deliberately in silence. Silouee came and stood beside him. Alice gazed at them in painful suspense.

"Fire Scalp is hungry?" uttered the outcast, as if desirous of breaking the oppressive restraint.

"No; but his spirit is sick. He has lost his brother. A thief has stole into the skin of Silouee."

"Silouee is here. Let Fire Scalp speak plain."

"It is well. Silouee stole a flower of the pale-faces. Fire Scalp has sworn to carry her back to her people."

"That can not be. She is to be the wife of the chief."

"Fire Scalp can not lie. He must make his word good. Let Silouee think well. Shall brothers fight for each other's scalp? Let him give back the squaw."

"No! Silouee would rather give up his life," said the outcast chief, springing back and drawing his knife.

"So be it, then, chief," sadly uttered Red Dan, in his own tongue, as he confronted the warrior. "Do your best, then, for if I live, she must go back."

Then the one-time sworn brothers met in a conflict that could end only in death. Alice crouched beside the fire, watching the deed with terror-stricken intensity.

A pen can not describe that scene. Both masters of their weapons, a long and uncertain struggle followed, in which both gave and received wounds. But right triumphed, and Silouee sunk back, while the once terrible war-cry—now faint and broken—quivered upon his lips. With the last note, his spirit fled, and the outcast chief was dead!

Though sorely wounded, Red Dan conveyed Alice safely to her friends. In the war that ensued, he bore a prominent part, and was one of those who destroyed the pirate vessels, and killed both Steed Bonnett and Dick Worley, the latter falling by his own hand.

In due time Henry Howland and Alice were wedded, and enjoyed a long and happy life.

They never afterward heard of the Coosaw maiden, Ayoana, though inquiries were made.

In that war, the Coosaws were entirely exterminated, Chinnabar, successor to Silouee, being the last to fall, weapons in hand, fighting desperately to the last, at the feet of the great chief, Cholucullah, who went down before the strong arm of Red Dan.

In succeeding wars, the settlement was destroyed, and now nothing remains to mark the place where it stood.

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